

The Nation.

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SPRING
BOOKS



LETTERS.

SUBSCRIBE TO DUKAKIS

Seattle

I had hoped to see a copy of your magazine again, which my husband and I read all through World War II. At that time we enjoyed it. But not now. I definitely want to cancel my subscription, as the offer was that I could cancel if not pleased.

I am so for Dukakis for President that it was like an intellectual blow to read your commendation of Jackson [editorial, "For Jesse Jackson and His Campaign," April 16]. It is true he speaks of the poor and other problems in a charismatic way. I prefer someone who has provided housing, gotten welfare mothers into jobs and handled the economy to someone who has no government experience and gives no economic solutions.

CANCEL! CANCEL! CANCEL!

Carol Nelson

TRADING PLACES

Great Neck, N.Y.

Your editorial supporting Jesse Jackson's candidacy almost persuades me. But then you describe his anti-Semitic remarks as merely "serious mistakes." What would you say, I wonder, if the situation was reversed?

What if a Rabbi Jesse Cohen had referred to Harlem as "niggertown"? And fraternized with someone who called apartheid's P.W. Botha a great man, and the civil rights cause a gutter movement? And what if that Jesse later called the associate "mistaken" and also apologized for his own ethnic slur? Would you call his remarks merely "serious mistakes"? Would you be happy to forget the earlier episodes and rush to support him if his platform was attractive? Not likely, I suspect, nor should you.

I may yet vote for Jackson's program and his promise. But a Jew or any nonracist is a fool not to be wary of the man. Niel Glixon

THE GREATER EVIL

St. Petersburg Beach, Fla.

I'm embarrassed—I have just sent gift subscriptions of *The Nation* to relatives and friends, hoping to bring some modicum of intelligence to an ever-widening epidemic of national insanity, and you join the "Jackson for President" mob of imbeciles. First *The New Republic* supports the *contras*, and then *The Nation* supports Jackson. There is no hope; the fall into right-wing reaction is not being opposed, it is being accelerated—by you.

Every vote for the unelectable Jackson is a vote for whomever the Republicans choose, unless they nominate a black. Do you think they might? The odds for this are higher than for Jackson becoming the President of the United States of America.

Why not come out for your own editor for President? He would have a better chance than Jackson. I apologize to all those to

whom I gave *The Nation*, and wish to tell them, "Forgive them; they know not what they do. Sometimes they do make sense."

Milton H. Aronson

END OF THE ROAD

Reno

During the course of my subscription to *The Nation*, I have frequently disagreed with some of your positions, frequently agreed with some and have been grateful for some of the exposés of malefactors.

This morning, upon reading your editorial endorsing Jesse Jackson, I found myself asking why I subscribe. Jackson has little administrative experience, and that which he has was a disaster. He has a mouth that functions before his mind is in gear. The thought of a preacher (whether Jackson or Robertson) in the White House makes my blood curdle.

I understand that your publication is left of center by a good deal, but I think you made a serious mistake. I request that you remove my name from your subscriber list immediately.

Allan M. Greenblatt

SAME AS IT EVER WAS?

Randolph, Mass.

I am saddened that the usually perceptive editors of *The Nation* have been taken in by the emotional appeal Jesse Jackson presents. We've already had eight years of a poorly educated, not-too-bright, charismatic President who, during the course of his life, has had very limited contact with the real world. Do you really think we could stand even one more year of same under a man with a different name?

Howard A. Karten

JACKSON FACTION

Arlington, Va.

Your endorsement of Jesse Jackson for the Democratic nomination for President was courageous, eloquent and moving. It was a brilliant editorial.

Bill Kaplan

HE WHO HESITATES IS LOST

Olympia, Wash.

I am so very pleased that you have given Jesse Jackson's campaign the front-page coverage it deserves. What I can't fathom is why it has taken you so long to do so. *The Nation* should have endorsed Jesse months ago. By now, you look a bit foolish, given that the primaries are in their last laps. Better late than never, I suppose.

Paul Cienfuegos

THIRD FORCE NOW

Hackensack, N.J.

Re: *The Nation's* endorsement of Jackson. The time is right for creating a new national coalition, and possibly a party, of the left.

Preconditions for creating such a force exist now. The program differences between George Bush and Michael Dukakis, the

likely nominees, are not profound. Both are more concerned about deficits and balancing budgets than about housing the homeless, helping the farmers and helping the unemployed. Neither concentrates on reducing military spending. Both are opposed to redistributing wealth through taxation. Jackson is different. Jackson calls for increasing taxation on the wealthy and substantially reducing military spending while placing a heavier proportion of defense costs on our allies. He calls for refurbishing our decaying highways and stopping family farm foreclosures.

Like him or not, agree with his accounting or not, Jackson offers populists and progressives the only candidate who speaks openly and unashamedly for what we believe in. And it's getting votes. This phenomenon must be harnessed. If we start right now, we can set up organized bodies in all fifty states that can stand up in Atlanta in July—and move out if the Democratic Party leadership chooses to go the centrist route.

First, a broad-based coalition of populists and progressives should call a national convocation for late June. A platform should be hammered out and plans set in motion to achieve ballot representation in as many states as possible, either through existing left parties or by getting the required number of signatures.

The Democratic Party leadership is concentrating its efforts on bringing back conservative voters who went for Reagan. If that means they ignore the voices of those newly energized by Jackson, it's time for us to get out. There is time, if we work fast, to get in place the framework of a coalition that will demand notice at the convention—and if unsatisfied will become its own party, and run its own candidate.

It's possible, but by no means definite, that Jackson could be that candidate. But whoever it is, he or she will need to represent a broader base than Jackson's electorate so far, to bring in the energies of progressives on every level, from environmentalists to peace activists.

In 1912 the Progressive Party, a coalition of Bull Moose progressives and La Follette Populists with Theodore Roosevelt as its standard bearer, garnered 28.6 percent of the total vote, more than the conservative, President Taft, while losing to the moderate progressive, Woodrow Wilson.

Maybe it can't be done in time, this time around. But in trying we provide an ongoing apparatus for a national left party. And that will prove that we don't have to sink toward the center anymore. Stand up for what you believe in. Write to me now (270 State Street, Hackensack, NJ 07601).

Arthur Rosen

The Nation welcomes letters—typed, double spaced and no longer than 300 words, please. Letters may be edited for reasons of space.

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EDITORIALS.

Insider Trading

The publication of Donald Regan's *For the Record: From Wall Street to Washington* has focused attention on two issues: whether it is troubling that the schedule of the leader of the free world was influenced by his horoscope and whether it was churlish of the former grand vizier of the White House staff to report this and other unkind things. But no one is asking whether public officials should profit from information gained on the public payroll and withheld from the rest of us.

Nowadays, the firsthand observations of former government people who are, or were, important enough to com-

mand six-figure advances from publishers are sometimes locked up by contract until the magazine excerpts appear on the stands. Publishers and magazines that buy serialization rights insist that they embargo their juiciest stories to enhance and protect the value of the subsidiary rights. If Don Regan was troubled about Nancy's stargazing or Ronnie's woolgathering, why didn't he complain at the time—or, more realistically, after he was shown the door? The answer is that his million-dollar memories were a top secret matter between him and his publishers. The information monopoly of book-writing public officials has been upheld by the Supreme Court. In *Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. v. Nation Enterprises*, our prepublication reporting on President Gerald Ford's version of the Nixon pardon in his

memoirs was held to be copyright infringement.

The Republic did not fall because the people weren't told about Nancy's influence on Ronnie's schedule. And the public has gained a fairly damning (if unsurprising) chapter and verse of Reagan's hands-off management style from tell-all books by Regan, Larry Speakes, Michael Deaver and David Stockman, even though pelf rather than patriotism motivated their whistle-blowing. And if all these books paint a picture of the White House as a doge's palace where concealed stilettos were part of the dress code, well, that's only consistent with the prevailing me-first ethos of the Reagan Administration. Washington is a town where the Attorney General fires his spokesman for not having the heart to lie about him to the press. (Or is Terry Eastland saving his defense of Meese for his memoirs?)

Why should the Reaganites complain about former White House employees disloyally rushing into print with unflattering tales about the President? Actually, their literary zeal should be hailed as the flowering of free enterprise. A member of the inner circle who suppressed his or her nastiest gossip out of considerations of tact or decency would end up writing a dull book (though not necessarily a bad one), worth perhaps a \$10,000 advance but not a million dollars. As literary entrepreneurs, Regan, Speakes, Stockman, Deaver et al. have a duty to serve up their toughest stuff—*Schadenfreude* sells.

We're all for authors getting what they can: They're a chronically underpaid lot (*pace* the I.R.S., which under a 1987 regulation, recently modified, treats them as if they were tax shelter operators). But high-level government officials aren't ordinary authors; by virtue of their public service they have acquired a free front-row seat to history—or what passes for it these days in Washington. Dare we suggest once again that some of the insider's knowledge they glommed while on the people's business belongs to the people? That awarding officials a lucrative monopoly on the notes and information generated by public service poorly serves the public?

What Price Gloire

Paris

The only free Kanaks are dead ones, the outgoing French government might have argued. In principle, all the inhabitants of New Caledonia are French citizens, and the great sin of the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front (F.L.N.K.S.) was to have rejected this privilege and demand independence. But when, for obviously electoral purposes, an assault was staged on May 5 to free French gendarmes held hostage by the Kanaks on the island of Ouvéa, and the resulting carnage proved too bloody, Prime Minister Jacques Chirac found a way to minimize the massacre. Only two Frenchmen, he claimed, had been killed—meaning the two soldiers of the intervention force; the nineteen murdered Kanaks had simply been deprived of their nationality. Kanaks, in this version, regain their independence on the way to paradise.

It would all be bizarre if it were not so cynically sinister. The French hostages were unscathed, even during the assault. Their Kanak keepers were slaughtered—some, witnesses allege, after they had surrendered. The Socialists are thus inheriting an additional deep division in an already messy situation. In economic and social terms, New Caledonia is a typical case of colonialism, with the power, the best land, and nickel and other wealth concentrated in the hands of the white settlers. But in electoral terms, it is not typical. The Europeans and their imported supporters have a slight numerical edge and will keep it for a few years until the rising Kanak generation comes of voting age. The new government has sent a commission of inquiry to find out what—if anything—can be done to reconcile the two communities. It would do well to order an investigation of the Ouvéa massacre in an effort to gain the trust of the Kanaks and warn the Caldoches, as the French settlers are called, that their days of unpunished arrogance may be over.

At least it can be said that the crime did not pay. The whole circus of Interior Minister Charles Pasqua, of which this episode was a crucial act, was of no electoral avail. Some National Front votes were certainly bought with Caledonian blood. But they were probably balanced by the resulting mobilization of liberal and leftist supporters. The second ballot of the presidential poll thus contained two consoling thoughts. First, that you can't fool all of the French all of the time; second, that for the time being at least, the presidential candidate openly wooing the National Front is in for a beating. Chirac's mere 46 percent, after the right had been ahead in the first ballot, is convincing proof.

DANIEL SINGER

Is Bush the One?

In bits and pieces, the Iran/*contra* scandal may finally be catching up with George Bush. Last week *Newsweek* and United Press International reported charges that Bush's national security adviser, Donald Gregg, was the Washington contact for the sale of weapons to the *contras* by arms dealers linked to drug trafficking. The allegation that Gregg was enlisted in a gunrunning network tied to Israeli intelligence, Panama's Gen. Manuel Noriega and the Medellín drug cartel originates with an Oregon businessman, Richard Brenneke, who has worked for both the C.I.A. and Mossad. Brenneke, who testified in private before Senator John Kerry's Foreign Relations subcommittee probing *contra* gunrunning and drug dealing, claims Gregg O.K.'d Brenneke's participation in this scheme, which was in operation during the time the Boland amendment prohibited U.S. military aid to the *contras*. Bush quickly labeled the stories "garbage" and lashed out at Kerry for leaking "slandorous" information.

Whether Brenneke's story holds up or not, Bush and Gregg still have some explaining to do about Gustavo Villoldo, a former C.I.A. agent and Bay of Pigs veteran who worked as a combat adviser to the *contras*. In 1983, Villoldo

arrived in Honduras with a letter of recommendation from Gregg, according to Allan Nairn, who in the May 1987 issue of *The Progressive* revealed Villoldo's role. A January 1984 memorandum signed by forty F.D.N. and Miskito *contra* commanders lauded Villoldo and noted he "could be the decisive element in this enterprise." Documents recently released by Kerry reveal that four months later Lieut. Col. Oliver North had a conversation with Duane Clarridge, the C.I.A.'s chief of covert operations in Latin America, in which Villoldo was apparently discussed. According to an entry in North's notebook, Clarridge told him "[deleted] contact indicates that Gustavo is involved w/ drugs." Other notebook entries show North maintained an interest in Villoldo. A June 23, 1986, note says Villoldo was tied to Mario Delamico, who ran an "arms supermarket" in Honduras that, according to another entry, was funded by narcotics money. Delamico's drugs-financed arms venture provided the weapons for the *contra* deals that Gregg supposedly monitored.

Gregg, a C.I.A. veteran of twenty-eight years, claims he had no involvement in *contra* support operations and that he was completely ignorant of covert *contra* support efforts until August 1986. Presumably, that covers Villoldo's activity. Bush has staunchly supported Gregg's account, maintaining that he was kept in the dark until after the scandal broke in November 1986. It must be a relief to them both that Villoldo has so far escaped the attention of most of the media and was ignored by the investigators of the Congressional Iran/*contra* committees. With the press now off and running to connect Bush and Gregg to the covert war in Central America, perhaps Villoldo will finally draw the attention he deserves. And then let Bush and Gregg defend the relationship of the Vice President's office to a *contra* adviser whose alleged ties to narcotics trafficking worried even the C.I.A. and Oliver North.

DAVID CORN

Alien Exclusion

Government officials continue to bar or expel foreigners from the United States under the political exclusion provisions of the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act. Now, however, in the face of public criticism and Congressional reforms, they expressly deny that they are acting out of ideological reasons. Sometimes they have justified exclusions on the ground that the alien's entry into the United States could undermine support for the Administration's foreign policy objectives. At other times, they have claimed that an individual was a terrorist or security risk, but withheld any evidence, thus leaving the alien no fair opportunity to rebut the accusation.

A few recent cases illustrate this trend. Currently, the State Department is considering denying a visa to an American-educated Vietnamese economist, Nguyen Xuan Oanh, who wants to come here in a private capacity to meet with American colleagues. Oanh, a former Prime Minister of South Vietnam, is an adviser to the Vietnamese govern-

ment and a member of the National Assembly. The State Department apparently intends to justify a denial on foreign policy grounds, arguing that Oanh's entry into the United States would be incompatible with our policy of isolating Vietnam. Precisely how the admission of an influential proponent of economic reform from a private-sector research group would confer legitimacy on the Hanoi government has not been stated.

Another case is that of Gerry Adams, a member of the British Parliament from West Belfast, who was denied a visa in March. The State Department justified its action by citing his public support of the Irish Republican Army, a presumed affront to U.S. support for Britain, and his involvement in terrorist activities. The information, if any, on which the latter allegation is based remains classified.

A third case concerns Fouad Rafeedie, a 31-year-old Arab who has lived in the United States since 1975. Rafeedie took a two-week trip abroad in 1986, and upon his return he was questioned by immigration authorities, who charge that he is connected with the radical Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Rafeedie, who lives near Cleveland and is married to an American, contested the allegation and requested a hearing. But the authorities invoked a provision of McCarran-Walter that permits arriving aliens to be excluded on the basis of "confidential" information, without a hearing.

The courts have begun to scrutinize the Administration's exercise of its visa power, particularly in cases involving questions of foreign policy. Last month, the U.S. Court of Appeals in Boston found that the State Department's exclusion of Hortensia Bussi De Allende, the widow of the former Chilean leader Salvador Allende Gossens, exceeded statutory authority and was contrary to a temporary one-year amendment to McCarran-Walter passed last December, which prohibits exclusion because of political advocacy or membership. The ruling in Boston was preceded by a decision of the Supreme Court last October upholding a finding by the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington that the Administration had again exceeded its power in denying visas in furtherance of foreign policy goals. The case involved Nino Pasti, former Italian general and senator; Tomás Borge, Nicaragua's Interior Minister; and two Cubans, Olga Finlay and Leonor Rodríguez-Lezcano, experts on women and family law.

Congress is seeking reforms in the law. Legislation introduced by Representative Barney Frank is scheduled for consideration by the House Judiciary Committee in June. Frank's bill would prohibit barring or expelling aliens for activities, affiliations and beliefs that are protected under the First Amendment. A permanent change in the law is needed to take this power from officials, even though, under pressure, the immigration authorities have forsworn its use.

While it is important to narrow the broad scope of McCarran-Walter, including the vague "foreign policy" notion, such a limited reform will not be sufficient to deal with the current fashion in exclusions. Congress should also ad-

dress the procedural deficiencies that deprive excluded aliens of a hearing to rebut the evidence on which the authorities rely. Such a hearing is accorded as a matter of course to aliens charged with being paupers and war criminals. If foreigners are denied this basic right, Congress and the American people will be left only with official assurances that "something else is going on" when these laws are invoked, as Jerome Ogden of the State Department wrote in *The New York Times*. Our traditions of free speech and due process demand more, for ultimately, it is Americans' right

to speak and associate with these people that is being denied.

ARTHUR C. HELTON

Arthur C. Helton is an attorney with the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights. He represents Choichiro Yatani, a Japanese scholar who was detained by immigration authorities in New York City in 1986, and Patricia Lara, a Colombian journalist who was excluded from the country on political grounds that same year, both of whom have filed lawsuits seeking information and redress relating to their mistreatment.

UNCIVIL LIBERTIES.

CALVIN TRILLIN

I don't know why I continue to read *Business Week's* annual issue on executive pay. It's bound to be discouraging. This year, for instance, when I learned that two executives of a company called Waste Management made more than \$13 million apiece in 1987, I couldn't help remembering that many years ago my father suggested waste disposal as a field I might think about entering myself. Yet another lost opportunity.



As I remember the conversation in which the subject of career opportunities in waste management came up, my father said something like, "If you don't straighten out, you're going to find yourself working on a garbage truck."

I wish I could report that I countered by predicting the sort of salary a good waste management executive might hope to command a few decades down the road, what with the growing problem of solid waste accumulation in this country. Even if I had, though, I suspect my father would have said that most of the solid waste in this country seemed to be accumulating in my bedroom. It's hard to win one of those arguments, particularly if you've been having a little trouble in first-year algebra.

Oddly enough, I was already familiar with an economic theory that encouraged a career in waste management. It was a theory I'd heard propounded by a World History teacher we called Colonel Jim, a former military man who had white hair and a yellowish mustache and a voice with a slur that most colonels acquire only late in the evening.

According to the word around our high school, Colonel Jim learned the names of only two or three people in each of his classes, and those people were assured of receiving an "A" no matter how profound their ignorance of the subject. Because of that, the first few days of the term in Colonel Jim's class were packed with entertainment, as one student or another tried to imprint himself on the colonel's mind—reciting the Gettysburg Address in answer to a question about the ancient Greeks, falling to the floor with a groan in the hope of being remembered as "the one with the bellyache," offering to wash the blackboard even though Colonel Jim rarely bothered to write anything on it.

The class in which Colonel Jim revealed his economic theory was almost as entertaining. Basically, the colonel

believed that people should be paid pretty much in direct proportion to the unpleasantness of their job. He said he couldn't understand why someone like a banker, who sat around all day in a comfortable office, should get more money than, say, a garbage man.

"Think of the garbage man on an August day!" the colonel would say, with considerable feeling. He then launched into a graphic description of a hot and nearly exhausted garbage man wrestling heavy cans of reeking garbage into the truck. The colonel, it turned out, had a gift for evocative description that could never have been guessed by those who had heard him slur over the Roman Empire in fifteen or twenty minutes. The part of the garbage saga I remember best was a description of how some of the garbage would invariably escape from the can as it was lifted into the truck and spill down the sleeve of the garbage man's shirt.

"Disgusting!" a student would shout from the back row at that point. "Someone stop him!" another student would shout, "I'm going to be sick!" "The one with the bellyache" would fall from his desk to the floor, clutching at his stomach, and people in nearby seats would begin to shout, "Boy down! There's a boy down in the back row!"

When I read in *Business Week* about the two well-compensated Waste Management executives—one of them, Philip B. Rooney, made \$14,276,000 last year; the other, Donald F. Flynn, went home with \$13,217,000—it naturally occurred to me that maybe someone was putting Colonel Jim's theory of just rewards into effect. After all, the chairman of Sara Lee, a man surrounded by cakes, made only \$5,788,000.

I realize that someone who pulls down \$13 million a year in waste management is in no danger of personally catching a sleeveful of garbage. Still, think of all those hot August days when Mr. and Mrs. Donald F. Flynn emerge from their luxury hotel, climb into a taxi and hear the driver say, "You folks must be in town for the waste management convention." Think of all the times a charming and elegant woman at a posh dinner party has turned to the man on her left and said, "And what do you do, Mr. Rooney?" I'm not sure that Colonel Jim would consider that sort of experience worth \$13 million a year, but in his scheme of things it's definitely worth something.

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MINORITY REPORT.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

Although he is Chilean and might have drawn upon an example nearer to hand, Ariel Dorfman set his novel *Widows* in Greece. Possibly this was to lend resonance to the theme he describes in the dedication—the theme of “the missing”:

Taken from their homes in the dead of night or abducted in open daylight on the streets, these people are never seen again. Their relatives are left not just without their loved ones but without any certainty about whether they are alive or dead. The “missing” are deprived of more than their homes, their livelihoods, their children. They are also deprived of their graves.

It is from Sophocles' *Antigone* that generations have rediscovered the appalling nature of desecration; the unforgivable blow that is dealt to humanity by the refusal of obsequies.

One month ago Costas Kassapis came to Washington to testify before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus. Of Greek Cypriot origin, Kassapis has been an American citizen for twenty-nine years. For the past fourteen of those years he has been reliving the moment when he saw his son taken away at gunpoint. Andrew was 17 at the time. The Turkish Army, embarked on the second wave of its invasion of Cyprus, had occupied the village of Asha in August of 1974. After keeping the inhabitants hostage in their homes for eleven days, the army started to round people up. As they dragged Andrew from the house, his father pressed his American passport into his hands, in what turned out to be the vain hope that it would serve as a talisman.

The name of Andrew Kassapis later appeared on the Turkish military's list of prisoners to be released to the International Red Cross. And a witness who was in the Amasia Prison in Turkey has testified repeatedly that he knew of Andrew's presence in the jail as late as October 1974. So here we have a rare case, in which the abductors cannot deny knowledge of their hostage, or explain away his disappearance as part of the chaos of wartime.

There are, in fact, 1,619 Greek and Greek Cypriot persons who are still missing from that summer. Many of them were photographed while in Turkish captivity, others were named in Turkish accounts of prisoners taken, and some were even allowed to broadcast over the Turkish propaganda radio. But not one has ever been seen alive again. Eight of these “disappeared” are American citizens, yet, by comparison to the Americans held hostage in Iran or kidnapped in Beirut, almost nothing is ever said about them.

But the conditions for a *démarche* by the United States are rather propitious. These eight men were not kidnapped and stuffed into a car by persons unknown. They were not taken by agents of a power that is hostile to the United States. They were taken prisoner by a signatory to the Geneva Convention; their captivity was notified to the Red Cross; and the army that took them prisoner is a close ally, not to say dependent, of Washington. Why, then, should Costas Kassapis be left to fight his battle alone?

In February of this year he was told, by Senator Donald

Riegle Jr., who had spoken to the Turkish authorities for him, that his son was “not alive.” This is a grave admission, since, if true, it means that he died while he was a prisoner of war. But Kassapis asks why he should accept it. Where is the proof? Where is the boy buried? How did he die, and when? Life is insupportable without at least this minimum of—what?—consolation?

Of the 1,619 possible cases, I have chosen Andrew Kassapis both because the circumstances of his “disappearance” are unusually well attested (we even know the names of his two abductors) and because he is an American citizen. The second observation may seem selective, but in this instance a U.S. passport is a distinct advantage in mounting and in authorizing an investigation. The site of all the disappearances in 1974 has been under Turkish military occupation since 1974. Greek Cypriot families, unlike their counterparts even in countries such as El Salvador, cannot wait outside government offices or search in forests and ravines. The whole area of the calamity has been placed off-limits to them. But American diplomatic and consular officials, as well as members of Congress and reporters, can cross the so-called Green Line with relative ease. Furthermore, it is U.S. aid that pays the cost of the military occupation. If this is not “leverage,” then what is?

For the convenience of any Foreign Service or Congressional officer who may be reading this, here are the names of the other seven Americans who went missing in the Turkish invasion: John Pappas, Socrates Kapsouris, Chris Libertos, Christos Butcher, Jack Sophocleos, Andrew Zevlaris, Kyriakos Leontiou. These names are not as well known as those of Terry Anderson or William Buckley, but then Terry Anderson and William Buckley were not made to disappear by a “friendly” country. When I spoke to Costas Kassapis last week, he said bitterly that if only his son had been grabbed by Communists, there would by now have been loud public diplomacy and even the movement of warships.

It is probably too late for heroic measures, but that need not mean a shrug of resignation. In June, Washington will receive President Kenan Evren of Turkey. Evren used to be, and in many ways still is, the commander of the Turkish armed forces. He thus has a double responsibility for the acts committed by his uniformed deputies. There need be no special privilege for those missing who happened to have American passports. But the United States government should do no less for the victims of its allies than it has done for the victims of its proclaimed foes. Whenever President Evren gives a press conference, or meets with White House dignitaries, or is introduced to officials at the State and Defense departments, he should be reminded that he owes an account to those families whose U.S. taxes go for the upkeep of his vast military establishment (\$490 million in fiscal 1988). If he still holds the hostages, let him give them up. If they have died in captivity, let him admit it in public, release all the details and make recompense as best he can. The torture of uncertainty, at least, is in his power to end—and therefore in ours too.

BOOKS & THE ARTS.

Humanism and Terror

MARSHALL BERMAN

ZION AND STATE: Nation, Class and the Shaping of Modern Israel. By Mitchell Cohen. Basil Blackwell. 322 pp. \$24.95.

THE YELLOW WIND. By David Grossman. Translated by Haim Watzman. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 216 pp. \$17.95.

A couple of thousand Jews jammed West 88th Street in New York City a few Sundays ago to protest Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and to call for negotiation with the Palestinians leading to mutual recognition and peace. Grace Paley began her speech by retelling the Bible story in which the Jewish elders confronted the prophet Samuel and demanded that he "appoint for us a king to govern us like all the nations." The Bible says that God was appalled. He told Samuel to warn the people that a king might bring short-term gains in power, but would destroy the whole basis of community among the Jews, to the point where "you shall be his slaves." God offered a brilliant half-page of political sociology to explain this, but the people were not moved and shouted Samuel down: "No! but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations." At this point, a crowd of hecklers from the Jewish Defense League (who had been yelling "Dirty hymie!" and "This way for the gas chambers!") injected themselves into the story, and made it clear which side they were on, shouting, "David, King of Israel!" Today's quarrels over power and domination in Israel go back a long way.

The Samuel story could serve as an epigraph to Mitchell Cohen's incisive and fascinating book, *Zion and State*. Indeed, this biblical story may mark the birth of the Israeli genre in which Cohen is working, which I want to call critical history. Bernard Avishai, Jonathan Frankel, Yosef Gorni, Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, Amnon Rubinstein and Anita Shapira have written fine books in this genre. Critical history has

flourished since the Six-Day War, and continues to flourish amid the troubles of the past few months. It is propelled by the same bitter irony that animates the Book of Samuel, the same conviction that Israelis have been enslaved by a system of their own making, the same fear that, even as the nation has gained a bigger slice of the world, it has lost some of its own soul. Israel's critical historians fuse passion with analytic rigor in their collective attempt to discover what went wrong, whether the troubles were foreseen, whether anybody could have done anything about it, whether it is too late now for the people and the nation to retrieve the creative spirit that they once possessed but dissipated or threw away.

Cohen, a political theorist who teaches at the City University of New York, grew up in the Labor Zionist movement (for several years he edited *Jewish Frontier*, the movement's magazine) and became a student of what scholars call Western Marxism, the critical theories of Georg Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, the Frankfurt School, Sartre, Lucien Goldmann et al. *Zion and State* tries to synthesize these traditions by using Lukács's conception of "reification" to explain the tragedy of Zionism. Cohen explores in detail the political and ideological splits of the 1920s and 1930s, when Labor Zionists led by David Ben-Gurion clashed bitterly and violently with right-wing Revisionists led by Vladimir Jabotinsky. The left won, or seemed to win, and "Labour's victory . . . enabled it to become the primary architect of the Zionist state. However, with Labour's triumph came a self-transformation" that had ironic results: "From being an essential means to the liberation of the Jewish people, the state increasingly became a thing unto itself." The reification and fetishism of the state were happening among Labor Zionists even before the creation of the state of Israel. It led them to devalue their greatest achievement, the construction of a network of democratic socialist institutions: the kibbutzim, Israel's communal and collective agricultural settlements; the Histadrut, a complex of labor unions, cooperative enterprises and a socialized health system; and a socialist educational system. These institu-

tions not only survived but thrived under desperate adversity. But once the state was in place and the Labor Party in power, Israeli socialism "nationalized and subordinated its own institutions, thus, ultimately, undermining itself." Labor neglected its kibbutz sector, tried to incorporate the Histadrut into the state and deliberately destroyed its flourishing school system. It strove to de-ideologize itself and become what Europeans call a "catch-all party," and to drain Israeli political culture of its communal energies and humanistic ideals. Labor was perfectly open about what it was doing. "The ideology that leads to the creation of a state," Ben-Gurion's protégé Shimon Peres explained, "cannot remain after the state is created." Thus Labor "disarmed itself" and "helped to plant the seeds for a political culture much more suitable to its historical foes," Jabotinsky's heirs, Begin, Shamir and Sharon.

Critical history always leads us to the question: Did it have to happen this way? Were there alternatives? Could the catastrophe have been avoided? (Could it somehow still be avoided?) Cohen is familiar with the literature concerning what Max Weber called "the routinization of charisma." This is a process by which successful political movements lose their ideological distinctness; once they have attained power, they all tend to devolve into mere machines for keeping and expanding power. I don't think Cohen gives this phenomenon its due. But he would probably argue that the Israeli case is different from the others: that de-ideologization did not happen here, as elsewhere, by gradual attrition and entropy but by a series of conscious decisions and deliberate self-inflicted wounds.

The man who did most to make these wounds, and the villain of Cohen's story, turns out ironically also to be his hero—David Ben-Gurion. One of the most impressive things in *Zion and State* is its vision of Ben-Gurion, "the towering figure of modern Jewish history," who "more than any other individual [was] responsible for Jewish statehood, and simultaneously for the undermining of the chief tool he used to achieve it, the Israeli Labour movement." In the tragic ambiguity of Ben-Gurion's career, Cohen sees a parallel to Lenin, who was in fact one of the heroes of Ben-Gurion's youth. Cohen's portrait of Ben-Gurion brings

Marshall Berman is the author of All That Is Solid Melts Into Air (Penguin), and is now at work on a book about deconstruction and renewal in New York City.

to mind Victor Serge's picture of Lenin in the winter of 1921, just after Kronstadt. "This is Thermidor," Lenin said. "But we shan't let ourselves be guillotined. We shall make a Thermidor ourselves."

Why did the old man do it? Cohen places special emphasis on an obsessive dream that Ben-Gurion and his followers shared with masses of other Russian intellectuals: the dream of *normality*. Russian culture, so rich in Hamlets, schlemiels and underground men, conceived an idealized antithesis to these virtuosos of inwardness: the new man, the normal man, the man who is not paralyzed by thought or enervated by sensibility, who walks tall, looks sharp, says little, fights fiercely, sleeps well. (On second thought, the romance of normality goes back even further in Jewish history; it is one reason the elders and the people were clamoring for a king in the Book of Samuel.) In 1958, under a banner headline in *The Jerusalem Post*, Ben-Gurion proclaimed, "A New Jew Arises in Israel." This long-awaited hero was not only a new Jew but "a new man." He had "completely emerged from the distorted environment of the diaspora and its painful complexes." He was "rooted in the soil of the homeland, confident in himself and master of his fate." This fully integrated being was equally at home with his "distant, Biblical characteristics" and as a citizen of the contemporary world.

In retrospect, this fantasy of an Israeli John Wayne appears as romantic and utopian as any of the old socialist Zionist ideals. But the romance might have had a chance, if these new men and women had inherited and sustained a quiet, boring, unproblematic life. Instead, Israel was thrown into a cauldron, threatened repeatedly with destruction from without, and meanwhile radically transformed from within by new waves of immigration, Sephardic-Ashkenazic conflict, messianic fervor and religious polarization, and most of all by its unexpected roles as conqueror and occupier. Shimon Peres said in 1960, updating Ben-Gurion's pronouncement, that the problem for the new generation was "not to know what we want to be, but what we want to do." In fact, there may not be a people on earth under more pressure than the Israelis to decide, again and again, what they are going to be. But Labor's abdication of inwardness and idealism

left a dreadful void and left its supporters powerless to confront the real conditions of their collective life.

The terrible simplifiers of the Israeli right have been only too glad to fill the void. "The final irony," Cohen says, is that "after 'the end of ideology' was proclaimed" by Ben-Gurion's successors, "the technocratic Labourites were defeated by . . . an ideologue, Menachem Begin." Begin seized and clung to power because he offered the Israeli public a vision, at a moment when Labor had none. The movement for Jewish settlement of the West Bank — they called it "redemption of the land," of Judea and Samaria, Israel's biblical heartland — mobilized great waves of mass idealism, and satisfied an intense spiritual hunger, at a time when Labor had long forgotten how to address that idealism or that hunger. (Cohen might have added that Sharon's swaggering and brutal chauvinism satisfied many people's longing for "normal" politics, in ways that Peres's temporizing and compromising could never do.) "Labour, uncomprehending of its own defeat," Cohen observes bitterly near the book's end, had "long since ceased serious debate of its basic principles and strategies." Even now, more than a decade after Likud's ascension, Labor still hasn't learned; it hasn't even learned that there is something to learn.

Another of Cohen's villains, whom he especially blames for Labor's long-term poverty of vision, is Shimon Peres. His harshness toward Peres may seem ungracious, considering that in recent years Peres has been the only Israeli politician of any standing who has campaigned seriously for peace. Cohen might reply that Peres's contempt for idealism has deprived him of the psychic resources he desperately needs in this campaign. He has always said that Israelis need to discover what to do, not what to be. But the question of what to do about the West Bank and the Palestinians has emerged, more starkly now than ever, as a question of what Israel is going to be. Peres's incapacity to address this question, or even to recognize it, has drastically limited his power to touch the people and move them toward peace. Many of us have wondered why Israel's best so often lack all conviction, why they can't light up the sky with a vision of peace. *Zion and State* helps us see why: because, for decades, they've expended so much of their spirit putting out

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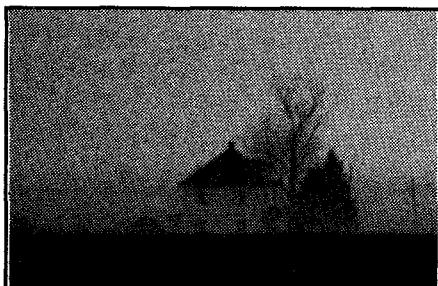
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their own inner light. Read it and weep.

David Grossman's *The Yellow Wind* belongs to another literary genre that has flourished in Israel over the past decade: something we might call the search for self through dialogue. Amos Oz, Lesley Hazleton, Haim Chertok and the Egyptian Sana Hassan, among others, have written impressively in this vein. This is a literature of existential crisis, experienced from the left. After reading *Zion and State*, we can see it as a return of the passionate quest for identity that the official left has long repressed. In this genre, cracks and conflicts in Israel's identity are fused with the author's uncertainty about his or her own. The author/narrators hope to find themselves through encounters with Israelis and Arabs who are defined as the religious, cultural, ideological Other—often, as their mortal enemy. The resonance of this quest in Israeli culture derives from its connection with one of the creators of that culture, the existentialist philosopher Martin Buber. According to Buber, honest, penetrating, open-ended dialogue between "I" and "thou" is the act that makes us human. The refusal of dialogue, the denial that there is anything to say, is a primary way for an individual or a society to stop being human. For obvious reasons, works in this genre tend to feature dialogue, or attempts at dialogue, between Jews and Palestinians. But many of the most anguished attempts, and the most brutal rejections, take place between Jew and Jew.

Grossman, born in Jerusalem in 1954, is an Israeli novelist. His fiction, acclaimed in Hebrew, has not as yet appeared in translation, but his gifts are apparent right away. *The Yellow Wind* is a study, made in early 1987, of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and what it has done to people, occupied and occupier alike. Grossman starts with the occupied, and visits the Deheisha refugee camp near Hebron. He finds a family who will talk with him, and a remarkable conversation takes place. The old lady of the family, proud in her fatalism after a life of work and suffering, reminds him of his Polish grandmother. This situation could be dissipated in a sentimental blur, but he has the chutzpah to say it, and the old lady sees the connection immediately and reflects on it, and goes on to speak almost as if the grandmother were there with them. She, and many other Palestinians he encounters, express an impressive range of feel-

ings toward him and other Israelis. She gets angry about how little Israelis—but also, perhaps, her own grandchildren—know of her people and her past: "Culture! You people don't know that we have culture! You can't understand this culture. It's not a culture of television!"

Suddenly she is completely emptied of her anger: once again her face takes on an expression of defeat, of knowing all, the ancient signs written on the faces of the old: "The world is hard, hard . . ." She nods her head in bitter sorrow, her eyes close themselves off from the small, dark room: "You can't understand. You can't understand anything. Ask, maybe, your grandmother to tell you."

Apart from the literary talent that enables Grossman to bring this old lady to life, he has a gift for empathy, a sweetness and openness that enables him to get close to people at the point where their life comes flowing out of them. (Anyone who has ever done interviews, a frustrating activity in which, so often, nothing is revealed, can appreciate this gift.) Grossman goes on to argue, as Israeli doves often argue, that Jews are now doing to Palestine what a legion of oppressors through the ages have done to Jews. But he doesn't have to argue the point, because he has made it live. The old lady has become part of our families, whether we want her around or not.

Many of the book's scenes present the occupation in searing detail: a family's home blown up by the Israeli Army because someone in the family has been arrested, even though the man was released immediately without charge; the soldiers on Allenby Bridge conducting strip-searches of old people, opening every baby's diaper to search for hidden explosives (once they actually found some), confiscating every toy and doll, even those that have passed inspection, who knows why, it's policy; a court-martial in which it is obvious to everyone in the room, including the prosecutor and judge, that the prisoner is innocent, but he has to be found guilty of something lest his false imprisonment embarrass the government. So it goes. These scenes are said to have created a sensation when Grossman presented them in a series of newspaper articles last spring. In recent months we have seen many scenes like them, and worse, on television. But they have deeper resonance when told in an author's voice that fuses a prophet's passionate anguish

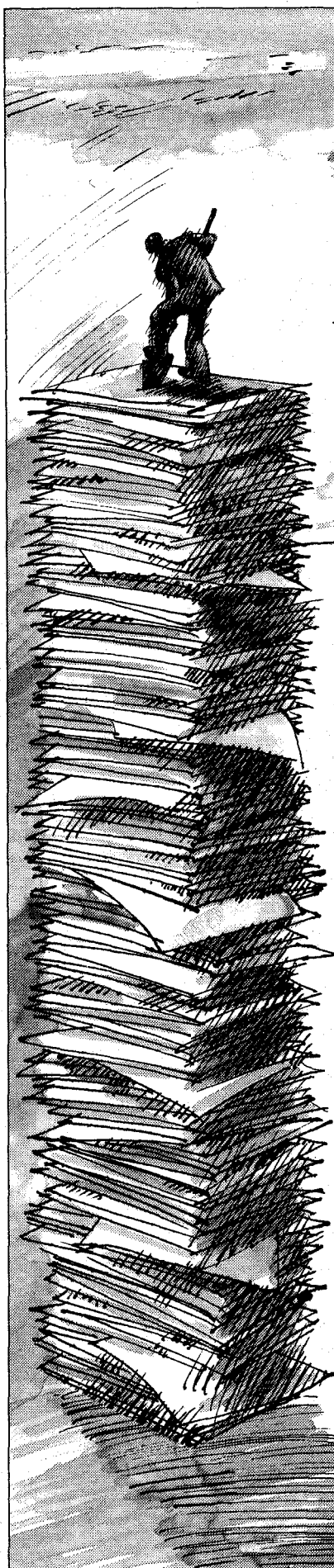
with a novelist's precision of detail.

One of Grossman's heroes, a Palestinian we are not likely to have seen on television (though *Nightline* gave us a thirty-second glimpse recently) is the lawyer and writer Raj'a Shehade. He is 35 years old and, like Grossman, a child of the Six-Day War. (People in the Middle East casually date their lives by wars.) He defends Palestinians caught in the occupation's gears, works to set up a law school on the West Bank and to develop social services—mental health is a top priority. He confronts the Israelis with trenchant challenges, but stands out for his ability to speak to them directly, even affectionately, as human beings. (Even the military police see this.) "The truth is," he tells Grossman, "that you suffer greatly from the occupation. . . . The long term is more dangerous for Israel than for us." Shehade, whose lawyer father was murdered, "apparently" by Palestinian extremists, has little love for the Arab world. (It is "now in a miserable state, there is no denying that. It is a world that is bad to live in. A world of oppression.") However,

Israel is founded on so many contradictions, and on so many opposing forces, that its existence is always in great danger. For example, there is a huge gap between the self-image of Israelis and reality. . . . You are prisoners of your conceptions and refuse to recognize reality. . . . To live in an area full of hostility and think that you can do so forever, without making any effort to come to terms with your neighbors, is simply not rational. You display no creative thinking about how to solve the conflict.

He admits readily that the Arabs aren't thinking creatively either. "The occupation is steadily destroying us. It destroys the entire fabric of civil and traditional life. We are caught in a totally false reality, and are beginning to think that it is the truth. That is a great danger. But I do not despair: there are so many things to fight for." One of the main things, one that "gives meaning to my life is that the situation is a challenge: to remain human even under the conditions that prevail."

Another powerful voice is that of a Palestinian whom Grossman calls Taher, disguising his true identity. Taher speaks in fluent, articulate Hebrew, which, he explains, he learned after 1967, because he knew that Israel was going to be on the West Bank for a long time. Grossman asks him, "How did you know?



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We ourselves weren't sure that we would." Taher replies, "That's because you still didn't know how much it suits a person to be a conqueror." Taher isn't much bothered by the swagger and bluster of the occupiers (unlike Grossman, who is mortified); he shrugs it off and laughs ironically—"That's the way history is: you won the war and we lost. I say, all right. Be conquerors." But he offers Israel incisive advice: "Push us, but with delicacy. Because sometimes you push so hard that we see how scared you are." The Israelis are afraid not of military defeat but of something less clear, and deeper—"You yourselves feel in your hearts that this isn't the right position for you." Indeed, twenty years after Israel's great victory,

no one understands what your country was originally meant to be, and no one remembers what they wanted to do, and believe me, when I sit down with a Jew (and I work with Jews all the time) I feel as if we are both of us in a prison under Israeli occupation.

A brilliant image, one that captures the full irony of the twisted dialectic that has turned the Israelis into captives of their success.

The Yellow Wind is full of great dialogue. But many of the most poignant moments in the book are about the failure of dialogue. At the kindergarten of the Deheisha refugee camp, the smiling young teachers encourage their 2-year-olds to play at shooting Jews, and tell them that this is what they will do when they grow up. When Grossman asks them if there couldn't be another way, beyond bringing up generation after generation in hatred, they insist passionately that there cannot, must not, be another way. They pour out venomous abuse against Yasir Arafat because they believe he wants peace. And they say they have a responsibility to the suffering of the past, to make sure that there will be no reconciliation in the future.

But the failures of dialogue are not with Arabs alone. Grossman asks Taher whether he isn't afraid that there will be a Beirut-style bloodbath on the West Bank after Israel leaves. Taher admits that this might well happen, and he knows that he would be a likely victim if it does. However, he adds, "there will be a second Beirut among you as well, because your debate over us, about the territories, is what keeps you from

the real disagreements you have among you, which you haven't pursued for twenty years." Here Grossman's Arab friend touches on his deepest fear: The struggles between Jews and Arabs may turn out to be more soluble and less tragic than the gulf between Jews and Jews.

This conclusion is suggested in Grossman's account of his futile attempts to enter into dialogue with West Bank settlers and followers of the Gush Emunim. His great gift for empathy and his desire for communication can't get to first base in their ball park.

Grossman pays a visit to the Ofra settlement. Amos Oz was there in the early 1980s (he describes his visit in *In the Land of Israel*), when Ofra was an outpost of messianic frenzy: "redemption of the land" was under way, the time of the Third Temple seemed to be at hand. Last spring, with the momentum of the settler movement stopped cold (thanks to Peres), with Ofra's own young terrorists in jail and their vision in disgrace (these were the yeshiva boys who were going to blow up the Dome of the Rock and start a world war—or was it an end-of-the-world war?), the settlers were depressed and confused, but

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just as implacable as ever. Grossman describes an evening with them, trying to get them to "imagine themselves in their Arab neighbors' places" and to feel what the occupation must feel like. They receive him politely, but he might as well be talking Gaelic. The sounds of silence are deafening. Finally one settler says that he can't afford even a minute of empathy, because if he allowed himself to pity and identify, it would weaken his will to carry on a total war. The others nod agreement, and this is as close to dialogue as they get.

The book's last scene is terrifying. A young mother and her 5-year-old son have been killed by a Molotov cocktail thrown into her car by terrorists hidden in a grove of trees. Settlers have rampaged through the neighboring Arab village, smashing and burning. The army has come to cut down the trees and prevent mob violence. Grossman attends the funeral. As the family huddles and weeps silently, suddenly ideologues of the Gush Emunim appear, including Meir Kahane; they seize control of the ceremony and turn it into a kind of Nuremberg rally, shaking their fists and shouting for revenge and blood. (We

saw some of these characters storming and threatening and applauding themselves at the funeral of young Tirza Porat, killed by the zealot who was supposed to be protecting her.) "I knew them all," Grossman says, "and I could speak with all of them"—settlers, villagers, soldiers, survivors, even terrorists—"as well as find similarities and sympathy between us. But now every eye is bloodshot, they are all possessed, the slaves of a single power, tyrannical and cruel, leading them, blinded, one into the other." For the first time in the book, Grossman, whose empathy and good spirits seem boundless, has come to despair of his capacity to feel and to heal. We want to reassure him and shore up his faith, but who knows? There are times and places where no amount of faith or hope or love will be enough.

If there is one word for Grossman's faith, it is humanism. This word is in some disrepute today; it is rare and awesome to come across the real thing. "I do not seek pure justice," Grossman says, "nor the settling of historical accounts, but rather possible life, no more than imperfect and tolerable, causing as little injustice as possible." He says that this

means limiting our aspirations: "I fear life among people who have an obligation to an absolute order. Absolute orders require, in the end, absolute deeds, and I, nebbish, am a partial, relative, imperfect man who prefers to make correctible mistakes rather than attain supernatural achievements." But the modesty is deceptive. For people in the Middle East, perpetrators and victims of so much hate and murder, to settle for acceptance of themselves and one another would itself be close to a supernatural achievement. We must hope that the humanists in Israel and in Palestine can find more kindred spirits soon.

The Palestinian uprising is putting increasing pressure on Israelis to decide what sort of people and nation they are going to be. This is just the sort of existential crisis that Ben-Gurion and his followers worked so hard to evade. But it may not be such a bad thing to face it at last. After twenty years of illusion, Grossman says on his last page, twenty years "in a desert void of emotion," it will be good for Israelis to face "a personal crossroads demanding action and thought. Sometimes you can gain in this way—for a split second—real moun-

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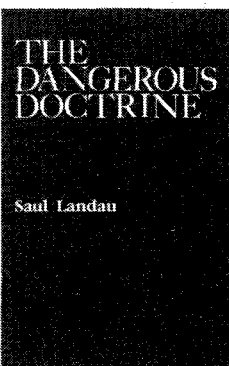
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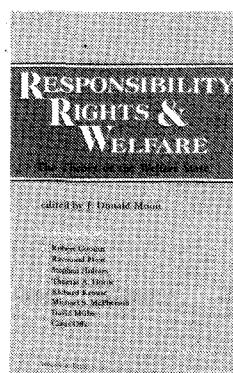
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tain air." *The Yellow Wind* ends by invoking the existentialist and humanist Albert Camus: to move from speech to moral action, Camus said, is to become human.

Americans should feel on familiar ground here. It wasn't so long ago, after all, that we were faced with an identity crisis of our own, also focused on an occupation against a hostile people. The American people went through terrible trials, but in the end, I believe, we learned something. It took a long time, but it

did take. (Nicaraguans, among others, can be glad that Americans learned and didn't forget.) The years of crisis were frightful, but exciting and creative as well. Cohen's and Grossman's books, and others like them, may be signs that Israel is working through and growing up. As the Book of Samuel suggests, it takes time for a people to hear and understand its prophets' voices. *Zion and State* and *The Yellow Wind* testify that the voices are still coming through. □

if their intelligentsia was either destroyed or subdued.

That the purges and Socialist Realism happened simultaneously in the Soviet Union shouldn't surprise us. Nowhere else except in Russia were history and literature so compounded; it was necessary to kill both of them. Seventy-seven-year-old Anatoli Rybakov spent three decades thinking about his own early 1930s stint in Siberia before writing this autobiographical novel, and then he had to wait another twenty years to see it published. It wasn't published for the first time in 1967, in spite of promises by *Novy Mir*. It wasn't published a second time in 1979, in spite of promises by *Oktiabr*. It was finally serialized a year ago in *Druzhba Narodov*, and arrives in the West with a blurb from that tireless publicist of the permissible, Yevgeni Yevtushenko: "In the tradition of the Russian social novel of the nineteenth century . . . one of the most daring steps of *glasnost*."

Well, yes, Russian intellectuals went to Siberia in the nineteenth century, too, the way New York intellectuals go to cocktail parties in the twentieth. And there, like Sasha, they confronted "real people," the mighty and ignorant *narod* about whom they'd always felt guilty and from whom they received surpassing kindnesses. And all that nature was good for them: "This vast eternity strengthened his faith," thinks Sasha, the Komsomol Boy Scout, "in something higher than the values he had lived for so far. Those who send people into exile were mistaken in thinking that they could break a human being that way. You could kill a man, but you could never break him."

One longs here for a Pasternak, a Mandelstam, a Ginzburg; for the savagery of Solzhenitsyn, the phantasmagorias of Aksyonov, the higher linguistics and Hobbesian yawp of Zinoviev, the besottedness of Dovlatov, Bulgakov's dog-man Sharik, even a Voinovich guffaw. Men and women, after all, were broken. According to Akhmatova (denounced by Zhdanov as "half nun, half whore"): "In the banished poet's room/terror and the muse watch by turn,/And a night is coming/that has no dawn."

Actually—in its exacting candor; its loving attention to the period details of "Oh, Little Lemons" dance hall music at the Metropole and the Savoy, "restaurant girls" smoking gold-tipped cigarettes, and mustard-bath abortions; its

Sasha Goes to Siberia

JOHN LEONARD

CHILDREN OF THE ARBAT. By Anatoli Rybakov. Translated by Harold Shukman. Little, Brown. 685 pp. \$19.95.

Vadim, a minor opportunist in Anatoli Rybakov's *Children of the Arbat*, quotes Belinsky, the ferocious nineteenth-century Russian literary critic, on why Peter was so Great:

Before, we needed Peter the Great's stick to give us at least a semblance of humanity; now what we need is to go through terror in order to make us human beings in the full and noble meaning of the word. Our brethren, the Slavs, cannot be awakened to consciousness quickly. It is a well-known fact that when the lightning does not strike, the peasant does not cross himself, he has no lord, however you interpret it, whereas the holy mother La Guillotine is a good thing.

Stalin, a major character in *Children of the Arbat*, has strong opinions on Chekhov, Gogol, Saltykov-Shchedrin and Gorky, but his favorite writer, of course, is Pushkin, whom he quotes on Peter: "He raised Russia on its hindlegs with his iron curb!"

Varya, the young heroine of *Children of the Arbat*, likes Pilnyak, Babel and Zoshchenko—but not Dostoyevsky: "He tears you apart."

Sasha, the young hero of *Children of the Arbat*, is partial to Tolstoy, even if you wouldn't know it from the poem he writes making fun of a student "shock-worker":

Since it now is the fashion
To work with a passion,
Kovalyov thinks he's haute couture.

This doggerel is less ambitious than Sta-

lin's own, haiku-like "Morning":

The rose unfolds its bud,
And tenderly embraces the violet,
High in the clouds
The lark breaks into a trill.

But it causes trouble anyway.

Although, as Comrade Solts declares, "The October Revolution didn't abolish rhymes," Sasha's rhymes are nevertheless offensive enough to get him sent to Siberia, where he reads Gogol and meets Mensheviks, anarchists, Social Revolutionaries, Trotskyists, national deviationists and a priest: "These are people who used to be important."

The time of *Children of the Arbat* is 1933-34. The characters—old Bolsheviks in the Politburo, young students in Moscow's bohemian quarter, technocrats on the pig-iron front, secret policemen, Mother Russia—are about to disappear into silence and terror, but before they go they are full of quotes from the classics, as if books, instead of an unconscious, did all their dreaming for them. While Sasha's in Siberia thinking about bears, kulaks and Varya, and Varya's in pubescence thinking about architecture, bread lines and Sasha, Stalin is writing, instead of poems, his own bloody novel, part Kafka, part Ludlum, in which Sergei Kirov is murdered in Leningrad and Andrei Zhdanov takes over as top cop of Soviet culture. According to Stalin:

Zhdanov was an intellectual, he understood literature and art, but he was not the know-it-all type like Lunacharsky. . . . And he now appeared to be managing his first major task, the creation of the Writers' Union, very well. Its forthcoming congress would be a turning point in the Party's relations with the intelligentsia. The writers, as the main force of the intelligentsia, had always claimed the spiritual leadership of the people. Consequently the people could be tamed only

John Leonard will be writing regularly on fiction for The Nation.

explications of such esoterica as Article 58 and the second five-year plan; its sexual reticence and Big Ideas and tin ear—*Children of the Arbat* is a lot like one of James T. Farrell's Danny O'Neill novels, except that Sasha goes to Siberia instead of the University of Chicago. And it's too much like Ostrovsky's *How the Steel Was Tempered* and Gladkov's *Cement*, especially for a loss-of-faith novel—which is to say, too Socialist Realistic, without dreams or symbols or depth psychology or ironic consciousness or radical departures in style and sensibility or even anywhere to put the huge emotions it evokes, as if Rybakov had survived Stalin but maybe Zhdanov had done him in after all.

What the novel does have that's very modern is paranoia. All of this is Stalin's fault. We spend a third of our time in his terrible head, when we aren't switching back and forth among the various Arbat children variously ashamed of getting on with their lives in the absence of Sasha—Lena the weepy, military Max, Vika in her silk underwear, Yuri of the N.K.V.D.—and also Sasha's despairing and enduring mother and his metallurgist uncle, Ryazanov. To explain this Stalin, five feet three with bad teeth and a Jewish dentist, loving Charlie Chaplin and hating everybody else, we need a Dostoyevsky for the abnormal psychology and a Trotsky for the historical ramparts, fretwork, gallows and chiaroscuro. We get a Rybakov instead, and he's far too casual. The best that can be said for his blackpatch Stalin is said by the victim Kirov:

Stalin had done much for the reconstruction of the country, and like all great historical figures he had stamped the mark of his personality on the epoch. Lenin would have carried out the task with more acceptable methods. But Lenin wasn't there. Stalin was there instead. Lenin had always worn shoes. Stalin wore boots.

Otherwise Stalin's just a monster who, out of his morbid suspiciousness, his seething social resentments and his not very interesting Georgian inferiority complex whipped up the great terror on his lonesome, and sustained it with anonymous mechanics in ministries of death: The devil made them do it. That's what the fuss has been about in the Soviet Union, and that's why *Children of the Arbat* is suddenly publishable by grace of *glasnost*, and all is forgiven, at least by Rybakov. But in the killing fields—death to Bolsheviks like Kirov,

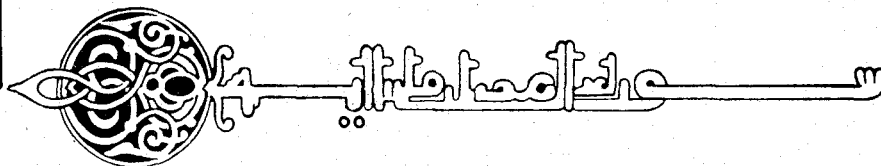
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Pilnyak, Tsvetayeva and Zoshchenko, not to mention 25 million lesser-known people also dead, if we count kulaks and the collectivization famine—Stalin had a lot of unforgivable help. □

Experiment in Freedom

THEODORE ROSENGARTEN

RECONSTRUCTION: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877. By Eric Foner. Harper & Row. 690 pp. \$29.95.

Seventy years after the end of the Civil War, young Southerners who wanted to investigate the period of Reconstruction were warned by their mentors against any "departure from the well-known facts." Some of their older colleagues could recall from childhood the turmoil of the postwar years. Others passed on the received wisdom as it had come to them. The story of the defeated South, dragged deeper into poverty and disorder by carpetbaggers, scalawags and Negroes carrying out the policies of vengeful Yankees, was taught in a spirit of inerrancy, as if it were the biblical account of the expulsion from Paradise.

Debate might rage about the causes of the war, or about the nature of the Populist revolt at the turn of the century, but the truth about Reconstruction was not subject to challenge. The prestige of the academy stood behind images broadcast by popular books and movies. Northern aggression, the story went, had not stopped with the overthrow of slavery and the crushing of the Confederacy. Using military occupation and Negro votes, the North went after the customs and institutions that made the South distinctive.

By the 1930s, when revisionist breezes began to stir and historians began to reconsider this view, the North had long since accepted the version of Reconstruction history put forward by friends of The Lost Cause. How bad was Reconstruction? In an article about South Carolina, the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* concluded in all sincerity: "All the misfortunes of war itself are insignificant when compared

with the sufferings of the people during Reconstruction."

The "tragic" view of Reconstruction had such a powerful hold on America because it justified the unjustifiable: It explained why black people could not vote or hold office in the South. By discrediting the era in which blacks were most active politically, historians were acquitting the Southern states of denying black people their constitutional rights.

Not that the historians knowingly told lies. William A. Dunning, John W. Burgess, Walter L. Fleming, E. Merton Coulter—these men were distinguished writers and teachers. Their thinking was warped, however, by a belief in the innate inferiority of "the Negro race." "One fact and one fact alone" explained their attitude toward Reconstruction, wrote the eminent scholar W.E.B. Du Bois: "They cannot conceive of Negroes as men." They could not believe that freedmen could judge for themselves that their interests were different from the interests of their former masters. They could not imagine that black people had wanted to be free, and once free in name, wanted to be really and wholly free, as free as white people.

Since the revisionists started writing, the era of white supremacy as a goal of public policy, has ended. Our understanding of humanity has changed, too, to the point where the notion of fixed races is supported by no branch of modern science. This situation calls for a new view of Reconstruction. Seen from the 1930s, the era appeared to be a painful interlude in the true destiny of the South, which was based on the rule of white people over blacks. Today, despite its considerable failures, Reconstruction appears to have been a giant step forward in the making of our democracy, an opening for experiments in relationships between peoples who had been artificially separated by slavery and for testing a standard of human rights that would be beaten back but not uprooted.

Eric Foner, the Dewitt Clinton Professor of American History at Columbia University, has written the Reconstruc-

tion book for our times. Monumental in scope, ranging over the North as well as the South, chronicling the postwar years and the historiography of the period, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution* is a feat of research and synthesis that is not likely to be repeated for a generation. Foner draws heavily on works inspired by the civil rights movement, in both its optimistic and pessimistic phases. At the same time—or rather, over the nine years that he worked on the book—he delved deeply into records left by people who participated in Reconstruction. The studies he used knock holes in the old story, brick by brick, fact by fact; the primary sources, examined in light of the evidence that white supremacy is not the future of the South, yield a picture of people groping creatively for the means to be independent.

Some of the old "facts" never made it into the modern era. The idea that the Ku Klux Klan originated "to succor the suffering" and "to protect the Constitution" fell victim to the violence and idiocy that have characterized the Klan's periodic revivals. By the time the reappraisal of Reconstruction had gotten under way, only fanatics could cling to the notion that the Black Codes passed by the first postwar legislatures in the defeated states constituted "a plan for guiding the freedmen into a place in the social order." (These laws sought to tie Negroes to the plantations under stringent labor contracts, and to punish those who refused to sign one.)

Other facts have held on with the tenacity of legend. Ask a high-school student today about the radical Republicans, and if he has heard of them at all he may say that they were madmen motivated by hatred for the South. Yet by and large the radicals were not vindictive people, and there certainly was never a vindictive majority. What lay behind their program, in Foner's view, was a commitment to equal justice and the practical desire to maintain Republican electoral strength.

Consider the question of military rule. Was the Federal occupation of the South "brutish," as Southern newspaper editors like to claim when they need a code word for villainy? Or was it firm and neutral toward blacks and whites alike? Or is it most accurate to say that the Northern military presence—1,100 soldiers stationed in Virginia late in 1869, at the height of the occupation; 716 in all of Mississippi; and similarly small

Theodore Rosengarten is the author of *All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw* (Viking) and *Tombee: Portrait of a Cotton Planter* (McGraw-Hill).

numbers across the rest of the recent Confederacy—did not amount to an occupation at all?

The myth persists that allowing Negroes to vote produced Negro domination. In actuality, blacks did not rule anywhere in the South. Only in Mississippi, Louisiana and South Carolina did they participate substantially in state government.

Is there a more enduring invention in all of American historiography than the myth of the carpetbaggers, those "infamous scoundrels" who came South to "loot" and "plunder" what little wealth was left? True, hundreds of Northerners went South to make money in the unsettled conditions. Teachers and missionaries went for other purposes, and then there were Union soldiers who stayed because they liked the South. But most of these people arrived *before* the Reconstruction Acts of 1867 removed former Confederates from office, opening the way to power for Northerners and Negroes.

What did the black man want from freedom? "What he wanted was a long holiday, a gun and a dog, and plenty of hunting and fishing," wrote Walter Lynwood Fleming, in an early, cleaner version of the joke that cost a recent Secretary of Agriculture his job. Foner shows that black people wanted to govern their own families, work for themselves and enjoy the protection of the law. They wanted land, first of all, but only a few were able to get some. They wanted to vote and to have the liberties that come with citizenship. Claims that the freedmen did not know what voting was are absurd and insupportable, though rife in the historical literature.

White people noticed that the freedmen moved around a lot after the war (except when they had an opportunity to acquire land; then they stayed put). Any movement would have attracted attention, since as slaves blacks could not travel freely. The novelty of Negroes going where they wanted prompted the explanation that they were moving simply for the novelty—like children. But with Foner we come to see that the freedmen were operating under the same motives as other people who migrate and wander in search of families and jobs.

There were reports, to be sure, that blacks had lost their good manners and turned "impudent" and "rude." Someone failed to remove his hat in the presence of a white man, or refused to step out of the road. Generally, how-

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ever, the rules of the Southern caste system were carefully observed, even by the most outspoken black officeholders. Political aggressiveness did not extend, concluded historian Francis B. Simkins, "to other phases of human relations. A staunch Republican voter was often a good servant in the house of a white Democrat."

President Lincoln did not know how he was going to bring the Southern states back into the Union. He had many plans and he had no plan. A New York newspaper, speaking for the opposition Democratic Party, likened him to "a traveller in an unknown country without a map." Foner accepts the kinder view that while Lee had only just surrendered, the time was not "ripe" to state a settled plan for reconstruction.

After Lincoln's murder, the job of uniting the country fell on the unsuitable shoulders of Andrew Johnson. A stubborn, hidebound man mired in "unspeakable prejudice" toward blacks, Johnson spurned the vastly expanded powers the Federal government had assumed during the war. Like Lincoln, he wanted to return the Southern states quickly to the fold, and to accomplish reunion he was prepared to offer amnesty and to restore property to all but high Confederate officials. The government was not obliged, he believed, to take special action to safeguard the rights of the freedmen. That was to be left up to the states.

It was not Johnson's intention to put the state governments back in the hands of the men who had led them out of the Union. He had never liked slavery, and he hoped to break the power of the planters who had monopolized the most fertile soil with their captive labor force. Johnson's views represented the thinking of the South's large yeoman class—the white majority of farmers who had owned no slaves and dreamed of the day when the plantations would be swept aside, along with the planters and the black tillers, so that, as former Confederate Gen. Matthew Butler testified to Congress in 1870, "white farmers would people the land, from the mountains to the sea." Johnson, too, envisioned a change at the top, with power shifting from the planters to the farmers—but only white farmers. "White men must manage the South," he declared. There was no place in his scheme for blacks.

Congress went along with Johnson for a year. Then his character and the

early results of his policies doomed his program. He isolated himself by vetoing two important pieces of legislation: first a bill to extend the life of the Freedmen's Bureau, and second, a civil rights bill pledging Federal protection for all citizens in the exercise of their nonpolitical rights secured by the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments.

Moderate Republicans, meanwhile, were growing alarmed at the number of rebels holding office in the new state governments. Violence against the freedmen was pervasive and intensifying. Negroes needed protection not only from assaults but from the Black Codes. The Ku Klux Klan and other terrorist organizations supplemented the harsh legislation with a campaign of lawlessness against freedmen who dared to test their liberty.

What gave the Federal government the right to intervene in the states on behalf of citizens' rights? Radicals and moderates took shelter behind a constitutional clause guaranteeing to each state a republican form of government—that is, a government elected by and responsible to all of its citizens. "Originally designed," Foner relates, "to permit the federal government to suppress insurrections and prevent a rebirth of monarchical and aristocratic institutions, the guarantee clause lay dormant until the Civil War." Republicans were elated and emboldened by it. One radical senator called the clause "the jewel of the Constitution." Now Congress, in a drastic application of its expanded authority, stood poised to remove Johnson's state governments and put "loyal" men in power.

There followed ten years of political and economic reconstruction marked, after the fifth year, by the government's ignoble retreat from its activist position, and finished off by the election of 1876: Rutherford Hayes, a Republican, traded a promise not to interfere with white rule in the South for the electoral votes necessary to win the Presidency. By this time Reconstruction had failed in its principle objectives: to secure political rights for blacks and to bring prosperity to the region.

Was failure inevitable? Would other policies have produced other results? If, for example, the government had rewarded the freedmen for their loyalty and assistance in putting down the rebellion by giving them land and genuine protection, and by enforcing their political rights,

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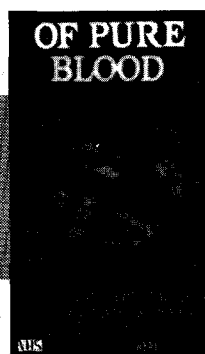
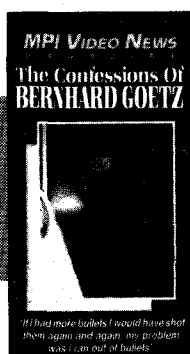
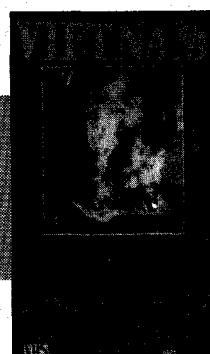
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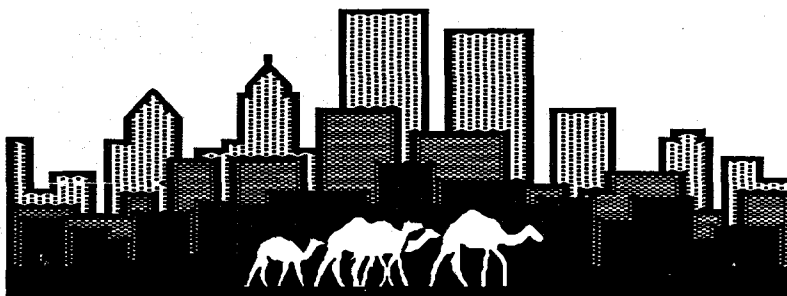
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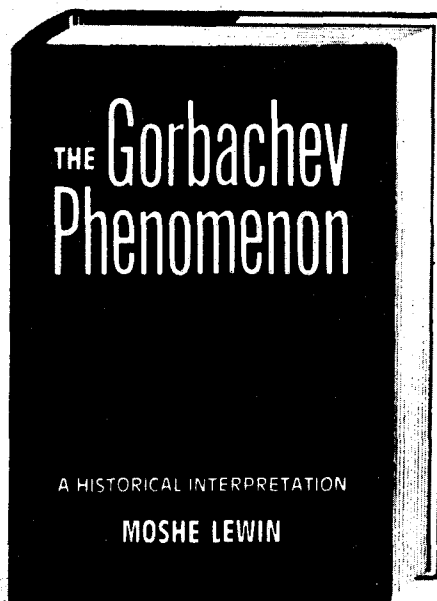
the South might have reconstructed sooner than it has.

Why, then, did radical Reconstruction fail? Some people would say that it failed because it wasn't revolutionary enough. A truly radical policy would have gone after the land. Thaddeus Stevens, the most radical man in Congress, wanted the government to seize 400 million acres belonging to the wealthiest 10 percent of planters, grant forty-acre parcels to each adult freedman and sell the rest at auction. His Republican colleagues, however, "preferred to await the freedmen's slow acquisition of property through the natural workings of the market."

One flaw in the moderates' strategy was that the freedmen's dealings with the market were anything but natural. Denied credit in their own names, black farmers were forced to buy their necessities at plantation or crossroads stores from merchants who held liens on their unharvested crops, and to sell their crops through their landlords. Few people could accumulate property under these constraints. Land, as Foner cautions, bringing to the topic a global perspective, would not have been enough. Yet without land, it could be said of the freedmen that they were turned loose naked in the world. Landless, they were condemned to dependence, a fate that white America believed was in keeping with their capacities.

Besides failing to remake the pattern of land ownership in the South, the Republicans never tried to dismantle what Francis B. Simkins has called "the greatest obstacle to the Negro's salvation, the Southern caste system." Not to beat a dead horse, but they failed to do so because they were in general agreement with its underlying philosophy, the belief in Negro inferiority. As a practical matter, the Republicans wanted Negro votes to maintain their edge over the Democrats—a situation not unlike the kind of bonding that goes on between black people and the Democratic Party today. Although recovered from the doctrine of separate species, the science of the day was under the spell of social Darwinism, which held that Negro inferiority was fixed by history and culture, if not biology. What may have distinguished Northern white feeling from Southern white feeling was the ability of Northern thinkers and legislators to separate political rights from the question of social and human equality. In the South, where blacks possessed only those rights that white people permitted

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them to have, the act of voting carried grave social implications. The world was turned upside down when Negroes suddenly voted.

Many white Southerners were starting over, too, in Reconstruction. War had reduced their herds of pigs, cows and sheep. In many sections "it would have been a benediction" to hear a rooster crow. A third of the South's horses had been killed—and between a fifth and a quarter of able-bodied white men—a proportional loss of life that we have come to expect of colonial wars in the twentieth century.

Houses were in short supply, and returning sons had to go back into their fathers' homes. Window glass had been replaced by boards in many houses and public buildings. "Clocks and watches have nearly all stopped," reported U.S. Gen. Henry Boynton. "Hair brushes and tooth brushes have all worn out." The South desperately needed supplies from the outside world. Roads and railroads were in disrepair, and the railroads were bankrupt besides.

Debilitating as these conditions were, the causes of Reconstruction's failures lay elsewhere. Foner is correct to point out that it was not wartime losses but rather the South's inability to attract capital from elsewhere and to unleash the talents of its lower classes that barred the region from prosperity. Ironically, many occupations open to blacks in slavery were closed to them in freedom.

Although they lost their influence in national politics, the planters during Reconstruction used their power at home to thwart what Foner calls "alternative economic enterprises that might threaten control of the labor force." They understood very well the potential of investments to transform society, and a social transformation was just what they did not want. They did want to make money, but money was not all; they wanted to preserve, as much as possible, their privileges from the old life. Across the cotton belt more cotton was planted on more acreage than ever. Yet wealth was elusive. The planters could not affect cotton prices, which fell steadily after 1870; neither could they maintain their share of the world market, a share decreasing in the face of competition from the four corners of the earth. Productivity declined, land values slumped and growers under pressure to meet their debts tried planting more, not less, of the familiar staple.

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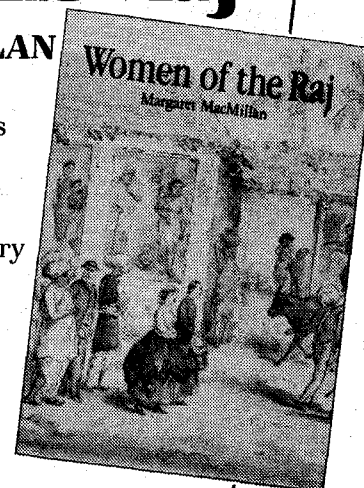
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to the failure of Reconstruction: the isolation and withering of the great anti-slavery leadership and the reluctance of new Republican leaders to put the cause of Negro rights ahead of partisan political goals; the weakening of radical influence in the party after Andrew Johnson's acquittal at his impeachment trial for "high crimes and misdemeanors"; Republicans' fears of appearing weak on property rights; the changed direction of the American reform tradition, particularly under the shock of the depression of 1873, away from concern for agriculture and toward concern for the industrial worker.

Reformers believed, and historians have been saying ever since, that corruption in Southern state governments was the result of keeping men of intelligence and culture out of office through severe tests of loyalty imposed upon former Confederates early in Reconstruction. For some reason, Southern corruption was made a special case, one that called for a reversal of national policy, while Northern corruption, which was to the Southern variety as a tidal wave is to a swell, could be cured by reforming the political process rather than by changing the ruling class. Foner places Southern corruption in a national context, where it doesn't seem special at all. It was not bad intentions, Foner argues, but rather the bad policies of inexperienced leaders that brought the Southern states to the brink and destroyed confidence in the Reconstruction governments. Vast expenditures on programs that returned no revenues produced enormous state debts, high taxes and a spirit of revolt.

But the flaws in the spending policies do not seem so obvious. Many programs pushed through by the postwar, racially mixed legislatures seem sane and constructive, such as programs to establish public schools and to assist the needy. Furthermore, Reconstruction expenditures seem large only when compared, as Francis Simkins has done, "against the parsimony of the governments immediately preceding and following." Were expenditures too burdensome, or did the governments lack the power to collect revenues? Is Simkins correct in

saying "there was a taxpayers' strike rather than a tax collectors' orgy"?

When the landless people of the South, and the blacks in particular, most needed the Federal government to step in and protect them, the government turned away. All three branches. President Ulysses S. Grant refused to send troops to Mississippi to stop murderous attacks against blacks trying to campaign and vote in the state elections of 1875, thereby signaling to white supremacists in other states that it was safe to disenfranchise blacks and to kill them if they resisted. To send troops to protect black lives in Mississippi would have been a forbidden exercise of "centralized" power, while to turn the troops loose against the Indians in the West was lauded in Congress as the fulfillment of national destiny. For its part, the Supreme Court ruled in 1875 that responsibility for punishing crimes committed by individuals rested solely "with state and local authorities," thus ending the national government's brief but honorable role as guarantor of its citizens' civil and political rights.

A story as large as the story of Reconstruction defies attempts at brief narration. Foner's research ranges over vast geographic and intellectual territories. From Virginia through Texas and, in the North, from Maine through the Indian territories, Foner has sought out the essential experiences, the common threads, the local variants. Of the goals he set for himself, he has been most successful in portraying the emergence of "a national state possessing vastly expanded authority and a new set of purposes." Where he pursues his story outside the South, he wisely abandons his plan to keep black people at the center. The account of Reconstruction in New York, for example, is not about black assertion and self-expression.

Yet by turning to the North, Foner discovers the distinctiveness of the Southern experience. What we have been calling Reconstruction was a regional convulsion, a reaction to policies thought up by Northerners to whom the recovery of the South was a sideshow to the main event—the industrialization of the North. As we know, the sideshow has overtaken the main event in audience appeal. And for good reason. What happened in the South during Reconstruction was personal, disturbing, unfinished. In their experiments with freedom, black Southerners acquired a sense of the highest purpose to which life can

be put, something they have given back to the country again and again.

Thus the scope of *Reconstruction* offers rewards and problems. The rewards stem from Foner's deep understanding of the literature of the period and his ability to draw freely from it, so that his arguments sprout in deep soil; and from his disciplined imagination, which neither approves nor condemns, but characterizes, and at its best dramatizes situations, preserving and savoring their possibilities, so that the betrayal of Reconstruction comes with a terrible poignancy. The problems arise from the book's constantly shifting locales, never staying in one place long enough to evoke a feeling for what makes it different from the next; from introducing and dropping characters who rise momentarily from obscurity to become builders of the new order or defenders of the old; from mixing the vocabularies of many genres and academic disciplines, making us overly aware of the author's role as the synthesizer.

This is a plea not for a shorter book or for a less comprehensive one but for a method that gives more emphasis to meditation and less to accumulation. My choice of a model for this ideal undertaking would be Foner's own *Nothing but Freedom*, an elegant inquiry conducted on three levels—international, regional and local—into the struggle to control the labor of the emancipated slave. Composed of three essays (delivered originally as the Walter Lynwood Fleming Lectures in Southern History, at Louisiana State University in 1982), *Nothing but Freedom* is a triumph of art over assemblage. The third essay, about a series of strikes in the South Carolina rice fields in 1876, may be the finest monograph on Southern history to appear in the last decade. Focused on a single peninsula of watery land and on a discrete cast of freedmen and planters, the narrative is as well engineered as a rice field whose simple form conceals the immense labor that went into carving it out of the landscape. In *Reconstruction* we have Foner's South, which will finish ushering out Dunning's South as the accepted picture of the region. In *Nothing but Freedom*, we have something else: a worm's-eye view of reality, in which the author succeeds in producing the illusion that he is reporting events, not ordering them; the story of men and women struggling to re-create the South, or their part of it, by reaching deeply into their cultural resources. □

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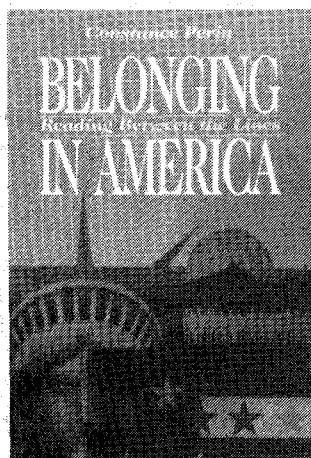
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Embarrassed Palefaces

STUART KLAWANS

AMERICAN POETRY SINCE 1970: Up Late. *Selected and introduced by Andrei Codrescu. Four Walls Eight Windows. 591 pp. Paper \$12.95.*

A HISTORY OF MODERN POETRY: Modernism and After. *By David Perkins. Harvard University Press. 694 pp. \$25.*

Randall Jarrell once remarked that the poet in our time is like a maker of stone hand axes. That was forty years ago. From the vantage point of the 1980s, most poets would agree that Jarrell didn't know how good he had it. Contemporary poetry, according to the conventional wisdom, is that which goes unread. It is, however, argued over, and with a vehemence that sometimes seems livelier than the poems themselves. Consider this sampler of recent invective.

Mary Kinzie: "Ashbery is the passive bard of a period in which the insipid has turned into the heavily toxic."

Louis Simpson: "Most American poets lack a theme. . . . After a while they are reduced to making casual remarks about matters of no importance."

Robert Dana: "'Tired' is the word for most contemporary poetry. 'Competence' *ad nauseam*. Minor brilliances. . . . [Much] of our present poetry seems the product of a single, generalized voice and mind. Poet copying poet."

And here, in a now-legendary example, Diane Wakoski attacks John Hollander for his apostasy against free verse. Through his sin, Hollander became a figure like Milton's Satan, "full of spite from lack of recognition and thinly disguised anger, one who was frustrated and petty from that frustration."

One begins to envision poetry, like the contested estate in *Bleak House*, as having long since disappeared, while the arguments over it continue to rage. Thus, it is with a sense of relief that I recommend Andrei Codrescu's plump new anthology, *American Poetry Since 1970: Up Late*. Here are real, live poets, 104 of them.

And here, too, is an argument. Introducing his book, Codrescu gets into the spirit not by praising the poets but by attacking David Perkins, the Harvard professor who recently brought out *A History of Modern Poetry:*

Modernism and After. Perkins, says Codrescu, is one of those professor-poets guilty of maintaining "the proposition that poetry, like all things, has been getting worse since the days of the gods, in this case Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot but mostly Eliot."

Against this version of American poetry—whether it really is Perkins's version remains to be seen—Codrescu puts forth an anthology of outsiders. It is a forthrightly exclusive selection, which does not try to summarize all the poetries of the past two decades but rather takes a stand for some of them. Thus, there are no rhyme-and-meter mongers here. Although the so-called New Formalists have been at the center of recent debates, you would not know from Codrescu that they even exist. Nor does Codrescu include the Creative Writing poets—the ones with the carefully controlled voices, reciting carefully graded lists of images that drop away to a carefully painted *aperçu*. Neo-Surrealists *are* included, but not the ones who practice an artful, Ashbery-style verse. Codrescu's Surrealists are closer to the original models, who disdained art itself. "The majority" of the poets, Codrescu writes, "are anti-literary, as avantgardists have always been. This is, however, an avantgarde without a single program, in a country where the term 'avantgarde' never even took root, having been supplanted by the more academic and ambiguous 'modernism.'"

In other words, these are the poets who say no—no to professionalism, no to inclusion in a canon, no to quibbles about form, no to literature itself. If they feel allegiance to any tradition, it seems to be one not of writing but of generalized opposition: "New American Poetry, since Whitman, has been at odds with official culture over the facts of America," Codrescu writes; and that's as much of an appeal as he gives to any figure earlier than Frank O'Hara. These up-late poets do not intend to have their measurements taken and compared with those of other known specimens, because they suspect they're being fitted not for their laureates' robes but for a casket. Whatever their various purposes, they do not write to be judged by David Perkins. I suspect they shouldn't be subjected even to the indignity of this review.

Nevertheless: Having noted the prin-

cial negative virtues of these poets, let me mention the positive as well. The first is rapidity. You don't have to wait for anything to happen in these poems. Sometimes it's the writer's feelings that come at you in a rush, as in Maureen Owen's "African Sunday":

Fuck I want to be bound by
devotion! Tortured
by passion!

just like the ad says

for d h Lawrence's
Sons and Lovers in today's
Sunday Times instead I'm
here with you . . .

Sometimes the rushing you hear is language itself blowing by. Here is the start of "Redo" by Lyn Hejinian:

Agreement swerves
a sonnet to the consonants.
Sparrows. As a wind
blows over the twigs of a rough nest
entered by a bird that impales
a vowel on its beak . . .

One way or the other, these poets seem determined to step on the gas and go.

Despite this insistence on contemporaneity, this passion for writing in the moment, a few of the up-late poets retain their sense of history, literary or otherwise. Ed Sanders is represented here with his long and lovely "Yiddish Speaking Socialists of The Lower East Side":

Oh they failed
but I can hear their ghosts
walk down the cobbles
outside the St. Mark's church

Sam Abrams contributes "The World Is With Me Just Enough," a tribute to being tickled by a 7-year-old, which contains his declaration, "i'd rather be a pagan/tickled in a creed outworn."

Another virtue appears: lightness of tone. The poets here who prefer personal statement avoid the deep, hollow tones of sincerity; the collagists, the Surrealists, and the more impersonal writers manage to avoid the drone, the boom, the bardic wheeze. Even the explicitly political poems—Michael Brownstein's "Declaration of Independence," Bernadette Mayer's "The Tragic Condition of the Statue of Liberty," Codrescu's own "A Petite Histoire of Red Fascism"—tend toward the quick, the satirical, even the burlesque.

On first glance, then, the Codrescu-Perkins split is the latest skirmish in that old war of redskins against palefaces. Given that it is now fifty years since

Philip Rahv identified the combatants, back when Jarrell was a mere youth, one might mutter, "plus ça change" and go home. If you *do* intend to leave now, I hope you will do so with a copy of *Up Late* under your arm. But if you suspect, as I do, that something else is going on, turn with me now to *A History of Modern Poetry*.

Granted, this book comes with the full backing of Harvard University, which in this case means it costs \$25 in hardcover and has a typo on every page. Perkins, for what it's worth, goes by the title of John P. Marquand Professor of English and American Literature. If you don't hold that against him, you will quickly discover that he's far from

the single-minded bore Codrescu portrays. In fact, he is generous, sympathetic, sensitive, inquisitive and has a goodly streak of common sense.

These are the virtues one hopes for in a literary historian; and that may be one reason Codrescu treats Perkins so harshly. Literary history itself has become something of a lost art in recent years. People who have studied literature—and I would bet that includes every one of the up-late poets—used to be drilled in the explication of texts. That went on from the 1950s through the early 1970s; since then, literary theory has taken over. (All right, this is a caricature and doesn't even mention feminist and Third World criticism—but as a picture of of-

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ficial literary studies, it's close enough.) Thus, for two or three generations, students have been told only in passing that literature might be an object for history. Witness Terry Eagleton's little book on literary theory, which has become a one-volume *Cliff's Notes* for the deep-thinking set. The names Auerbach and Curtius appear only once in it, and then as symbols of a quaint, half-forgotten past.

Perkins, evidently, has not forgotten. He approaches his subject with an initial impartiality, knowing that his own judgments cannot alter the facts: These were the poets who wrote during these years. Though Codrescu would have you believe that Perkins's interests are narrow, his focus in fact is as wide as he can make it, and his first effort is always to understand. Here is Perkins quite far afield from T.S. Eliot, explaining the open form of Charles Olson and Robert Duncan:

At least in theory, writing a poem was for these poets not different from any spontaneous act of living. Like most modern artists, moreover, they were impressed by the formal differences between life and the traditional work of art. The work was organized for an aesthetic purpose, selective in its use of

experience, delimited and meaningful. Life, on the other hand, is unselective, for it presents anything and everything. It flows on and on, and nothing within it is isolated, nothing exists as a completed entity.

In this sense, Perkins writes, open form was not an aesthetic strategy but rather "a matter of faith." This is as clear and meaningful an explanation as I've found. It is so good, in fact, that it elucidates much of the poetry in *Up Late*.

One can find passage after passage like this in Perkins. On the poets of the counterculture: "When a poet's transvaluations dramatically challenged the accepted norms of society, and his way of life proved his sincerity by what it sacrificed, immense moral power accrued. Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder sometimes write very well, but their great influence has derived from the image we have of their lives in conjunction with their poems." And here is Perkins explaining how Pound and Williams became the great influences on American poetry after World War II: "Pound and Williams were of the high Modernist generation. They carried the prestige of the 1920s and could hand it on, as the ancient fathers of Israel passed the tribal blessing to their sons. They were in

the United States. You could visit them. They were interested in your work. You could write them, enclosing poems, and Williams, at least, sent enthusiastic replies."

Clearly, Perkins has a talent for getting under the skins of different styles and into the heads of people who lived in the recent past. It is also clear that his history is not a traditionalist's polemic. His discussion, through the 1960s, is wide-ranging. Only when he gets to the 1970s does he narrow the field; and then he does so to give in-depth analyses of two poets, John Ashbery and James Merrill, who have firmly established their reputations.

This is where Codrescu begins to quarrel with him in earnest. One can say in Perkins's defense that it may be too soon for a historian to deal with poets of the 1970s and 1980s. One might add that Perkins praises Ashbery and Merrill highly, but not past reason. But this, I suspect, is just what bothers Codrescu. It is Perkins's moderation, his broad sympathies, that set off the argument against him. Why?

The answer may be that Perkins is capable of absorbing even the up-late poets into the body of literature. His fault lies not in having ignored them

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now but in showing a willingness to understand, sort and label them twenty years from now. This is precisely what these poets fear. The real question, then, is why they should be afraid—why bother to write poetry if you don't want to be part of literature? Till now, I've taken the up-late poets at face value, as hotheads in full revolt. Now it's time to question them more closely.

"The making of community against anti-social technology is the chief object of the poetry gathered here," Codrescu writes. But what sort of community is being made? Think for a moment of the places where people come together. They form communities where they work; but there is not a single poem in *Up Late* about labor. Nobody sells insurance; nobody doctors in New Jersey. Bernadette Mayer writes about not living on a farm, and that's it for the world of work. People also get together through sports. Sometimes, in fact, I think sports is the only unifying element in American society. There is only one poem that involves sports (a very good one, by Elinor Nauen). People get together through voluntary associations: They attend church, form political groups, play in garage bands. But they don't do any of those things in *Up Late*.

Then there is the street where one lives, the neighborhood, the town. Nobody writes about those places, either, although Jim Gustafson has poems on the *idea* of San Francisco and Detroit. Ethnic groups are communities, but the poets in *Up Late* who bother to think about that form of society are, not surprisingly, Lorenzo Thomas, Alberto Rios and Victor Hernandez Cruz. Finally, there is the most obvious form of community, the family. In 568 pages of text, I found only three poems that had anything to do with families.

To complete my survey, I then checked how many of the poets in *Up Late* write about being poets. The answer is roughly a third.

It becomes obvious, then, that Codrescu is talking about making a community of poets. That, I believe, is the guilty secret of *Up Late*. In the old battle, the writers of sensibility and tradition were the palefaces; the writers of raw experience were the redskins. But here the rebellious, risk-taking poets are forming, of all things, a republic of letters. In 1988! No wonder they become uneasy when David Perkins walks into the room—they've already done half his work for him. These are not redskins—they are embarrassed palefaces.

I have characterized the poetry here as rapid and light in tone, even when its subjects might invite a weightier treatment. Those are indeed virtues, in the better poems. In the worse, one begins to get a sense of skimming along. It is then that one feels how little the poetry is engaged with the world at large, and how much it cares about the world of poetry. Here, for example, is a poem by Bill Berkson, "Star Motel," in its entirety:

Inside I could hear
a party of people
the aimless cars
and in the middle distance
inexorable murmurs
of the ice machines.

Well, it's a poem. It's not bad. But think of it this way: If you were to come on with this intensity on a date, you would be home, alone, by about 10:30.

People who are interested in literary history may discern the genealogy of poems such as this, with their pretense of worldliness masking a priestly disengagement. They are the offspring of Frank O'Hara, in particular the poems he referred to as "I do this I do that." Now, I do not mean to disparage O'Hara, an admirable poet, but merely to point out a fact of literary inheritance:

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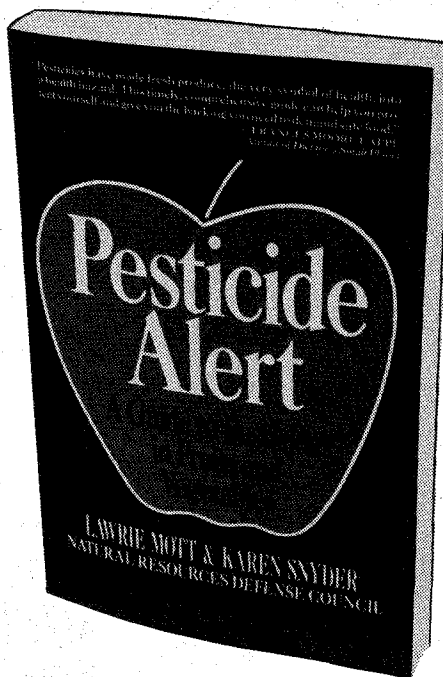
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It is often the weakest part of a writer's work that becomes the most influential. That's because the weakest part is the most easily imitated; and in O'Hara's "I do this I do that" poems one may find the beginnings of the living-in-the-moment in much of *Up Late*, and of its accompanying fault—an absence of deep emotion.

Of all his "I do this I do that" poems, probably none pulls off the trick so well as "The Day Lady Died." The bulk of it runs on from mundane detail to detail:

and for Mike I just stroll into the
PARK LANE
Liquor Store and ask for a bottle of
Strega and
then I go back where I came from to
6th Avenue
and the tobacconist in the
Ziegfeld Theatre and
casually ask for a carton of
Gauloises . . .

And so forth. The poem departs from thisness-and-thatness only in its last lines, when O'Hara, having picked up a copy of the *New York Post*, sees that Billie Holiday has died. Then, all at once, he feels himself back at the Five Spot,

while she whispered a song along
the keyboard
to Mal Waldron and everyone and I
stopped breathing

So the accumulation of ordinary detail gives way at last to the memory of a moment of transcendence, a sudden loss of breath. The poem works. But for all O'Hara's unpretentious, plain speech, I feel there's something dishonest going on here. The moment of transcendence wasn't his creation; it was the work of Billie Holiday. O'Hara points to her and says, "See, *she* was great," and then takes credit for her art.

Why shouldn't poets give their readers what Billie Holiday gave her audience every night? They used to. Indeed, even today, there are poets who can deliver something very like her electric charge. As evidence, here in its entirety is an early poem by Rita Dove (who is not included in *Up Late*). It is called "Nigger Song: An Odyssey," and it doesn't just point to Billie Holiday, it *embodies* her.

We six pile in, the engine
churning ink:
We ride into the night.
Past factories, past graveyards
And the broken eyes of windows,
we ride

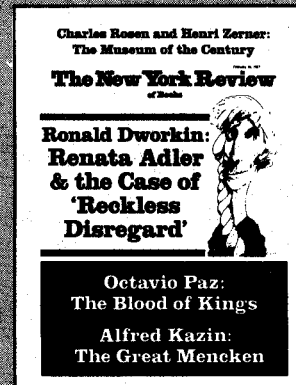
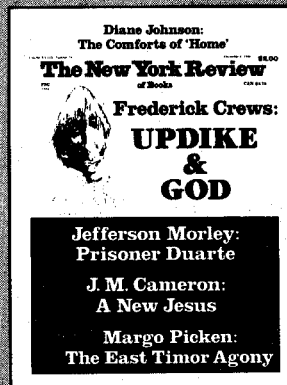
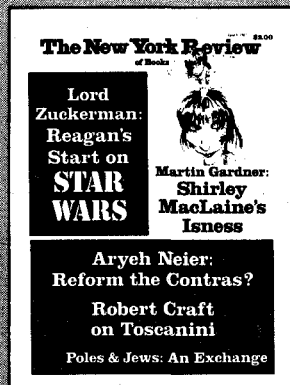
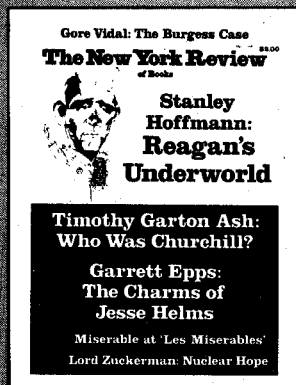
Into the gray-green nigger night.

We sweep past excavation sites;
the pits
Of gravel gleam like mounds of ice.
Weeds clutch at the wheels;
We laugh and swerve away, veering
Into the black entrails of the earth,
The green smoke sizzling
on our tongues.

In the nigger night, thick
with the smell of cabbages,
Nothing can catch us.
Laughter spills like gin from glasses,
And "yeah" we whisper, "yeah"
We croon, "yeah."

You remember this, don't you? It's poetry, the real stuff. Some of the poets in *Up Late* remember it, too. A lot of them don't. Instead of poetry, they provide good company, wit, clever observation, the occasional puzzle to solve. That's a lot, certainly enough to make the book worth your while. But the best thing I can say about *Up Late* is also the worst: It's the fastest read of any poetry anthology I've seen.

I expect that someday, David Perkins will indeed write a history that includes many of the poets in *Up Late*. He will bring out all their best qualities and probably deal more gently than I have with their shortcomings. He also will thank Andrei Codrescu, as he should, for assembling them and for having the courage and intelligence to be their advocate. By that point, of course, Codrescu and his fellow poets will have flown off into some new and still-unnamed realm, from which they will view Perkins's efforts with derision. And that, too, is as it should be. I only hope that by then, this useless railing against literature will have ceased. There is nothing cowardly about wanting to write literature—Rita Dove and thousands of others have proved that. Problems arise only when people are too sure of what they mean by literature. In that sense, as an anthologist of the contemporary, Codrescu is every bit as timid as he accuses Perkins of being. Where are the song lyrics? Where is August Darnell of Kid Creole and the Coconuts—a true Surrealist if ever there was one—or that plain-spoken populist Springsteen or all those adversarial rappers? Where is American folk poetry, such as "Here I sit, all broken-hearted"? And has no one noticed that David Mamet, single-handedly, has brought back verse drama? Contemporary poetry, in some of its



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guises, is indeed marginal to American life; but in other guises, it has come very close to the heart. *Up Late* and *A History of Modern Poetry* might both have benefited from including the truly popular forms of poetry. With

their somewhat incompatible virtues, though, they deal very well with what they attempt to cover. My advice is to read them both, then set out into the wider world, with Providence, Rita Dove and Kid Creole as your guides. □

Flexible Flyer

JOSEPHINE JACOBSEN

THE GREEN DARK. By Marie Ponsot. Alfred A. Knopf. 70 pp. \$16.95

In her new collection, *The Green Dark*, Marie Ponsot writes: "If I don't speak to tap & ease it out, / I grow dry & dumb & will die wick-ed." The explosive need expressed in that charged statement had already resulted in her previous *Admit Impediment*, written after the twenty-year silence which followed her earliest book, *True Minds*. Two decades of accumulated skill, passion and discipline were there to be tapped; and *Admit Impediment* was an accomplishment sufficient to establish Ponsot as a formidable and resourceful poet. Alone, it would have raised her beyond the fatigue characteristic of much contemporary poetry.

Now, seven years later, comes *The Green Dark*, to evidence that *Admit Impediment* was not an isolated phenomenon. Ponsot's new book has the force, the scope and the emotional impact of *Admit Impediment*; but it shows an even more powerful, and hence relaxed, ability to play with language, to fuse the witty with the grave. Lines are so compressed and rich that the temptation to quote is irresistible; one fights against the idea that the best comment would be composed entirely of quotation. The themes that long ago were announced in the first book, and recurred in *Admit Impediment*, persist in *The Green Dark*.

All good poetry springs from its own idiosyncratic root. Ponsot writes, as a woman, of women (among other facts of creation), and she has a pitilessly clear sense of what being a woman entails. But since communication, tenderness and perception are what she values as a human being, even those poems most harshly addressing women's predicament cut wider and deeper than any purely polemical poetry could man-

age. If deafness and violence have too often been the male stances, it is those stances that are under attack, as is nigardliness of spirit. Often, here, when the woman speaks, the man is listening to himself: "He believes as if deaf / what he says." In "Beyond the Fertile Crescent," when Aphrodite leaves her seashell,

... she takes a man's word seriously
when he offers water. He owns a well.
... she gets water enough,
cupfuls, pitcherfuls, to cook and wash
clothes,
not to plunge in.

As thirst needs water, so love requires the gesture of giving instead of snatching. In *Admit Impediments*'s splendid sequence "From the Fountain at Vaucluse," the women cup their hands to drink, look into the pool's waters; the boys and men throw stones to break its surface:

Cockerel, brash, these July boys and
men
Cannot love what they have never seen
Or see what pecking greed keeps hid
from them.
Trained not to listen for what their
lives mean
But to beat.
... Boys we raise to thrive under
cockpit stress,
Faced here with peaceful force, must
intervene.

Whereas the progression from *Admit Impediment* to *The Green Dark* is discernible, there is no real break in the continuity of Ponsot's work. The poetry of her first book is a different matter. The sense of faith is present in the last two books; but in *True Minds* it was the obvious catalyst: overt, exalted, full of promise and the joy of its realization. True, even in the earliest poems, the passion desired is identified as "miracle," as an "incautious faith." But the tone is "Glad that we love and good at it, we riot in it." There is even here the desire for communication, the absence of which later becomes so dire. "It is not ring-magic or the faithing leap of sex / That make me your woman." The note of warning sounds. Already the poet sees the inherent danger, as Prometheus thought he saw "man be-

come godly, and the means of power innocent in man." Those last three words are the key to the vision of the later poems. In these, power almost never proves to be innocent in man. On the contrary, it shows not as responsibility but as weapon. Already, in her earliest book, Ponsot was concerned with the powerless. In "Communion of Saints: The Poor Bastard Under the Bridge," she focuses on the nighttime derelict (who will die within the hour) as welcomed with laurel and "the victor's shout . . . to heaven's golden ringing brim." The language of these poems is at once more tight-knit and more elaborate, but the basic concerns are there: the holistic life; the matter of sexual—and all other—communication; the passion for form in all its aspects. Her acute sense of underlying rhythms is basic to her work. In "ten minutes" the thicket is bounded by what the wood thrush speaks "every seventh second." Every twenty-eight days the moon "diagrams the light way . . . to describe mathematics." "Every generation the child hurries out of child/hood head bared."

Ponsot identifies her long silence with that imposed or self-inflicted on other women whose gifts, hope, years, have been absorbed by a deaf masculine power. The new poems have come through disillusion and anger (although these are not forgotten) to the flowering of a kind of power that is innocent: the triumph of control in the face of any peril, even one of failure or disaster. Against the obstacles she sees as chief impediments, Ponsot brings her forces: wit, the belief in generosity of mind and spirit and, above all, her confidence in the healing inherent in the power of language. She has close identification with women of the past:

Groggy with joy and grief,
Infirm, alphabet, allowed for,
How was it you held steady
Without franchise where you stood
At the last extremity of love?

In *Admit Impediment*, Ponsot showed that lyricism, fury, wisdom and irony all could be caught into a single strand. Already she had written poetry totally lacking in the taint of the trivial, that danger lurking in the faintest traces of the sententious. In *The Green Dark*, her poetry is slightly more complex in the sense of demanding the reader's fullest attention. Whether a poem's subject matter is large or small, its purpose is revelation, a shift in viewpoint, a

Josephine Jacobsen's most recent book of poems is *The Sisters* (The Bench Press).

fresh focus. Some poetry uses a self-conscious obfuscation or a tortured convolution of technique to create a verbal maze, drawn-out, intricate, at the core of which is finally revealed a plastic gnome. At the center of Ponsot's poems there waits a live revelation, and it is this reward that is perhaps the poetry's chief excellence. Certainly emotion and the intellect are not natural enemies, but they can and often do make frigid bed-fellows. The poems of *The Green Dark* in all their variety are fully available to any reader who follows their nuances and connections. As familiarity with the work increases, that following becomes more and more exhilarating.

It is impressive to see how this poet manages wordplay—funny, sharp, often dazzling—without giving the laborious sense of tours de force. The double, sometimes triple levels of meaning are so smoothly absorbed by the poem that the phrase, word or sentence has already functioned before the full content registers. Emotionally chilled by the aspects of insect life, she writes, "Ants leave me cold." "Regardless love is hard to bear." Of the juggler's strain and courage, "The juggler in her suit of nerve." Of seeing violence masquerading as love, "If love struck her like that, she'd refuse."

Ponsot not only considers violence masquerading as love; she ties violence in intimate relations to the violence that threatens all humanity. In a wonderfully perceptive poem on the process of human mating, "De-fusing the Usual Criminal Metaphors," she contrasts kinds of coming together: the giving and the receiving, the quest and the opening, with the vocabulary of macho conquest:

Pity the idle who
(though daily our lives
must make room for those who use
clubs guns knives)
speak as if a penis were,
when erect,
a tower of hard.

Here's no jackhammer jammed
home ruthlessly
but the yielding press of stamen
under bee, . . .

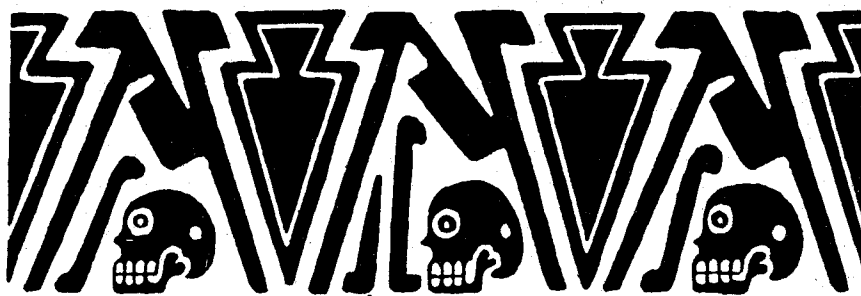
Here's no plow, ramrod, sword;
no piercing cut—

Ponsot sees sexual violence as more than sexual, as part of the greed for power, the jackboot, gun-on-hip image that has cost the world so much in misery. It is this comprehension that all violence is integrated—"all storms one storm"—that gives these poems their

scope and depth. Though she does not absolve from the grim aspects of power abuse, she does see its connection to current demands. In *Admit Impediment's* most polemical poem, she called angrily on the god of "man's desire and will," a bloody god of war:

No matter what we have written,
what other gods we may praise,
we celebrate no mystery
but yours; it is your law we obey . . .
We elevate the failure of the woman
who with her single body
is trying to safesurround
her several children; nearby
intact with agony an old
man sits on the ground
our gentle sons
have blasted in your name.

Those "gentle sons" turned killer are the logical end of the cockerel, brash boys. This passage, from the deaf and the aggressive to the brutal and the lethal, was implied in *Admit Impediment*. Now *The Green Dark*, while sharing these assumptions, moves with an even greater sense of poetic control, avoiding skillfully the rocks of compromise or shrillness. Control, daring and the sort of serenity that emerges from the victory over danger and the threat of failure are strikingly evident in two of *The Green Dark's* best poems, both dealing on the physical level with a deeper core of the identity that must be extracted exactly from the moment's peril. The book's first poem, given a



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section to itself, is "On a Library of Congress Photo of Eunice B. Winkless, 1904." It is a wonderful poem, which I wish I could quote in its entirety. The girl is mounted on her mare, high above the preposterous leap into the tiny pool below, and the poem holds that tension to the final word. Here again are the multiple levels of language. Eunice, "flexible flyer of summer." Holding the reins, "her life is in her hands." Like that poised rider, the juggler has reached an equilibrium, threatened, but held. Her moment of greatest triumph is when her hands are empty of the impediments she must keep constantly in flight. The juggler's

. . . small touching skill is:
holding nothing.

Holding on, she is not a juggler.
She is you and me, hands full of things
she must practice juggling to get
out from under.

The practice of form is precious to Ponsot. Like another inventive woman poet, Marilyn Hacker, she is at ease in any number of intricate traditional forms, yet always free from rigidity.

In *The Green Dark*, Ponsot is conscious of women in their cast roles: woman as servant, woman as ornament, woman as background. She pinpoints them all; but neither oppressor nor oppressed are caricatures. They are denizens of a common world, which can be at least partially healed by a generous listening. In matters of love, she has come through to an unillusioned poise. The final poem tells that sum:

. . . I've stopped saying yes
to the doom of being what I despise;
doom is not a self but a game, a guess,
a child's costume—and a
deadly disguise
I can just get rid of like an ugly dress.

Ponsot settles for the "causeless joy" that "turns my hand to what's left of my true/experiment in the forward of surprise." At this stage of her work, it should be clear that Marie Ponsot is one of the most interesting and original poets now writing. She has preserved her hard-earned hope, and, like Eliot, constructed something on which to rejoice. In "The Problem of the Future," she no longer expects gardens that have low gates to Eden

. . . or in a burst of roses
flaunt truth from stem to stem
the command grows:
to prophesy such gardens.
She prophesies such gardens. □

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FILMS.

EDWARD W. SAID

Wedding in Galilee Friendship's Death

There are few films in international circulation that give any but the most biased picture of Palestinian life. Beginning with *Exodus*, Hollywood films have unquestioningly identified Israel with heroism, pioneering enterprise and anti-Communist antiterrorism. *Delta Force* and *Black Sunday* show the Palestinians as murderous terrorists whose only victims are innocent civilians; Sylvester Stallone is making another *Rambo*, in Israel; and CBS recently broadcast a film about a Palestinian terrorist's trial. Films produced in the Arab world, especially in Egypt, the heart of Arab film culture, have not generally been part of the international network. The only Arab director to have made a name for himself abroad is Youssef Chahine, and aside from the occasionally interesting Syrian, Iraqi or Tunisian feature, films by and for Arabs are of strictly regional importance. Egyptian comedies, and melodramas in particular, continue to delight huge Arab audiences that have still not made the switch to *Dallas* and *Dynasty*.

It is, I think, some sort of testimony to the stubborn durability of the Palestinian narrative that fascinating aspects of it have recently emerged in two radically different, and eccentric, works: Michel Khleifi's *Wedding in Galilee* and Peter Wollen's *Friendship's Death*. Both were made before the uprising on the West Bank and in Gaza totally transformed the media image of Palestinians. Khleifi is from Nazareth (in Israel proper, not the occupied territories) but has lived and worked in Belgium for a decade; his film is credited as a Franco-Belgian-Palestinian co-production, although it was filmed in Israel/Palestine. His earlier film, *The Fertile Memory*, was a lyrical documentary about two Palestinian women. *Wedding in Galilee* is a much more ambitious drama that takes place during a very long day in the life of a Palestinian village.

Khleifi's cuts between the dozens of scenes that make up his film are abrupt and, I feel, awkward. The cast is a sizable one, and the ideas operate on

several levels. But *Wedding in Galilee* is nevertheless a profoundly affecting account of the Palestinian quandary, seen not exclusively as the result of Israeli occupation but also as the extension of problems endemic to Arab society in the late twentieth century. An elderly man (Ali el Akili) whose village has been punished by curfew secures permission to hold a big wedding for his son, on condition that the Israeli military governor (Makram Khoury) and his staff attend the ceremonies along with the other guests. This is not to everyone's liking, but the wedding proceeds.

Khleifi interweaves a number of strands, all of them connected to the main event, and illustrative in quite inventive ways of the central impasse in Palestinian society: the failure of continuity and of settled existence that has attended on Israel's presence. The son, Adel (Nazih Akleh), cannot consummate his marriage because of the patriarch's imposing authority; his sister Sumaya, played by the Tunisian Sonia Amar, wants out of the village, but can only visualize herself escaping as a man. A group of young men plot, but fail, to kill the Israelis; assorted relatives voice and demonstrate attitudes of loud defiance or undignified collaboration; a pair of elderly relatives wander in and out like Chekhovian retainers, casting a deepening shadow over the festivities; Tali (Tali Dorat), an Israeli woman in uniform, passes out but is revived by Arab women in a seduction scene that is dangerously close to a Pierre Loti or Orientalist fantasy.

Khleifi's method is to keep pretty much to the mundane matters in hand, a method likely to leave the impression, on most Palestinians and Arabs, of a quaint folkloric scene. But then he brings you up short with a gesture or a sequence that rends the veil of sentimentalism. Most of the actors are amateurs, but they perform the required volte-face with conviction. Thus the old man is seen talking tenderly to his sleeping son, trying somehow to communicate a dream to him—then the boy awakens, and the old man's tone changes abruptly to sharp reproof. Or, when the Israeli commander and his crew savor the feast, one of them says without embarrassment that it is not as good as the food in Lebanon—some day, he adds with the confidence of power, you will have a meal in Aleppo.

Rituals often go awry, as when the thoroughbred mare used to transport

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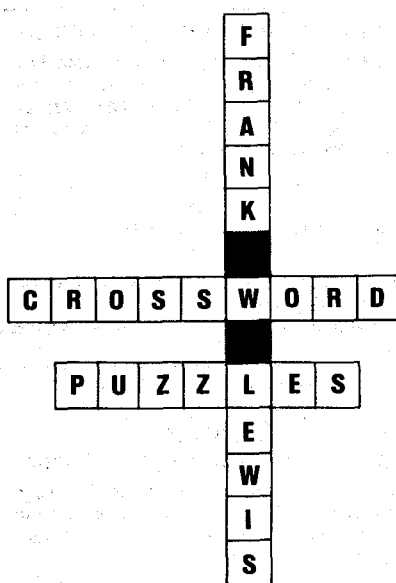
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the groom breaks out of her stall and runs into a nearby field, which has been mined by the Israelis. A disquieting sequence ensues. The Israeli soldiers hold a map of the mines' location and, firing their rifles, try to scare the animal into moving safely between the mines to freedom; the old man, petrified that his lovely mare will either be blown up or driven crazy, takes over and coaxes her out but is forced to do so under the Israelis' thumb. One is left with a remarkably reflective portrait of Palestinian life trapped inside various boxes, all of them reconfirming the present impasse. The film's affectionate frankness is indebted to Italian *verismo* and to the visionary clarity of many Third World films during the past two decades.

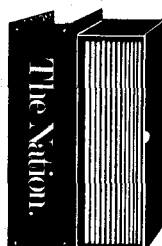
Wollen's work is much more self-consciously avant-garde. He is a well-known film theorist and director, whose *Signs and Meanings in the Cinema* and the more recent *Readings and Writings* have given him his reputation as a politically engaged intransigent. *Friendship's Death* is based on a short story about Wollen's sojourn in Amman during the early days of Black September, 1970. In the story, Friendship is a creature from outer space whose voyage to M.I.T. (where he has been sent to visit Noam Chomsky, for the study of linguistics *and* peace) has been deflected, and who has ended up in Amman. The narrator is a left-wing journalist who sympathizes with the Palestinians and who is introduced to Friendship by one of the combatants. Narrator and humanoid become friends, both of them trapped in Amman as a fight between Jordanian regulars and Palestinian guerrillas rages furiously around them.

This is already enough to establish the peculiarity of Wollen's science fiction perspective—but it gets stranger. Friendship is fascinated with machines (clocks, vacuum cleaners and typewriters in particular), and of course he is interested in language. Nevertheless, his ability to comprehend earthly ideas is curiously limited (he can't understand the narrator's explanation of the Oedipus complex), and because he is a victim of sorts, he sides with the Palestinians. In doing so, he becomes "a representative, not so much of machines today, as of the potential oppressed class of intelligent machines and servo-mechanisms of tomorrow." (This is an idea not many Palestinians today will accept about themselves, but it is datable to



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1970.) Joining one of the militias, Friendship is separated from the narrator, who leaves Amman just before the final defeat. Friendship, he assumes, has been captured and killed; his sadness at the Palestinian debacle shades imperceptibly into his melancholy incomprehension of Friendship's visit. He is pushed into memorializing the episode (he feels, he says, "rather like the Evangelists must have felt before starting to write, many years after the death of the protagonist"), which he does by reproducing Friendship's translation of "L'Après-midi d'un faune," a virtuoso misreading of Mallarmé—e.g. "I vault to persecute these white water-lilies" for "Ces nymphes, je les veux perpétuer."

In the film version, Friendship is a woman (Tilda Swinton) whose gender and placid beauty are perfectly suited to the curiosity, concern, oppression and wisdom Wollen wants to convey in his portrait of the victimized saintly robot. The narrator is now a tough Hemingway-like character called Sullivan (Bill Patterson), whose probing confidence is a satisfying foil for the outsider, and for the historical moment. Wollen's filmic style is understatement, although his realization of the story greatly amplifies and elaborates the narrative. Odd bits of comedy and apocalypse jostle each other. Thus Friendship comes from the period after nuclear winter; she is interested in shaving and in human hair, being hairless herself; she dreams of succulence or of impossible objects. Sullivan is fascinated by maps; rows of tombstones in Jordan point the way to the events of Beirut.

When Friendship and Sullivan part for the last time, he gives her a razor in exchange for one of her memory chips. Back home in England, Sullivan's young daughter figures out a way to decode the chip by playing it on a VCR. What ensues is Wollen's visual transposition of the Mallarmé translation left behind by the robot. The terminal sequence is an extraordinary montage of bio-mathematical symbols, geometric patterns, nuclear explosions and incomprehensible sequences. But the final effect of this articulate and calm film, so unusual and intelligent, is a melancholy almost religious in its intensity.

What makes *Wedding in Galilee* and *Friendship's Death* so extraordinary is their postmodern unexpectedness, their eccentricity, their almost tangential connection to the Palestine story. Neither goes over the well-known territory now

so much in evidence during television news broadcasts, although in both films the human tragedy of Palestine has been transmuted into a quasi-mystical celebration of sacrifice and elegiac immobility. It is as if both these works of cinematic mastery, by turn witty and unutterably sad, have established a new nondiscursive medium for the Palestine story, which in one of its trajectories has gone beyond the brassy triumphalism of its military phase and settled into the travail of a difficult but far from ordinary everyday life. The other, more dominant and insurrectionary aspect of Palestinian life still awaits its Ponte Corvo or Costa-Gavras.

(*Wedding in Galilee* will be shown at the Film Forum in New York City in June. *Friendship's Death* will open at the city's Bleecker Street Cinemas later this year.) □

THEATER.

MOIRA HODGSON

The Road to Mecca

Athol Fugard's well-meaning, humane and flawed new play is a comment on what it means to be an artist. The central character in *The Road to Mecca* is an Afrikaaner widow called Helen, a recluse who lives in the dismal, isolated village of New Bethesda in the Karoo region of South Africa. Fifteen years ago, at the age of 55, when the husband she did not love died, she felt the need to express herself. She stopped going to church and instead, to the consternation of her straitlaced neighbors, began to create weird sculptures in her garden, using cement, bits of mirror and empty bottles. This collection of Wise Men, mermaids, owls and strange animals she now calls her Mecca—and they all face east. Children stone the sculptures, and her only real friend is a black woman from the village.

Five years before, Elsa Barlow, a young English schoolteacher traveling in the Karoo desert, had stayed with Helen and the two had become close friends. But Elsa now lives in Cape-town, twelve hours' drive away. She returns in response to Helen's plea for help: Marius Byleveld, the local minister, is trying to persuade Helen to give up her house and move into an old people's home. She is afraid she lacks the willpower and stamina to resist him.

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A nonpolitical three-character play about white South Africans may seem a departure for the author of such tragedies about apartheid as *The Blood Knot* and "*Master Harold*" . . . and *the boys*. But even though there are no blacks onstage in *The Road to Mecca*, they are very much part of the drama. And Fugard's play, while not overtly political, cannot help becoming a metaphor for apartheid. For this artist Helen is not recognized for what she is, nor even allowed to be herself. Instead, she is forced to live on the border of a rigid society that allows no compromise or deviation and keeps her out altogether.

Watching the lengthy first act of this play is a bit like being a passenger on a slow country train—each of the long and frequent stops along the way adds another detail to the exposition. Fugard doles out the information little by little, resorting to creaky theatrical devices, withholding facts and then revealing them at the appropriately dramatic moment. The two women create a bond of intimacy that frequently becomes cloying; Elsa brushes Helen's messy long gray hair and ties her sandals for her. "Let's face it, there's a little girl hidden away in both of us," Helen says as she

sinks her hands into the pockets of her shapeless sweater and fusses around her house. It looks like a Haight-Ashbury pad in the 1960s, decorated with plaster owls with car headlights for eyes, a reproduction of the *Mona Lisa*, half-burned candles and walls that are covered with broken bits of mirror. Helen is full of patter and cheerful jocularly to mask the fact that she's worried she's reached the end, that she faces darkness, that her gift is over. "My Mecca is finished, Elsa," she confesses at last, "and so is my life."

Elsa, who looks more as though she has just jogged around the block than driven 800 miles, produces her own set of rather predictable problems—a married man, an abortion—to balance those of Miss Helen. It is not until Marius, the minister, arrives, announced by a jaunty knock at the door at the end of the first act, that the play begins to take off.

Human beings are complex creatures, Fugard seems to be saying as he patiently apportions the three characters their share of virtues and defects. Miss Helen is at once courageous, self-deluding, childish and likable. Marius is both stiff and unyielding, yet heartbreaking

when he realizes the importance of Miss Helen's Mecca and the fact that his religion has never brought him anywhere near such a level of spiritual joy. Elsa, the least successful of the characters, is a feminist dependent on men, plain-spoken and ruthless with herself (she grimly explains that the lift she offered to a homeless black woman who was hiking eighty miles with a baby on her back and all her possessions in a plastic bag was just a sop to her conscience).

Fugard is excellent in the role of Marius, the zealous cleric who can't be so easily classified. Yvonne Bryceland as Helen, irritatingly fey in the first act, comes into her own in the second, when she stumbles, is caught in her own lies and finally catches us in her powerful convictions. But I could not abide Amy Irving's Elsa. She reminded me less of an English schoolteacher than the sort of American woman you meet in health clubs who is constantly trying to "share her feelings" with you.

The Road to Mecca, which Fugard also directs, delivers its message with honesty and compassion. This is not the greatest writing you'll find in the theater this season. But on a human level, it is an admirable play. □

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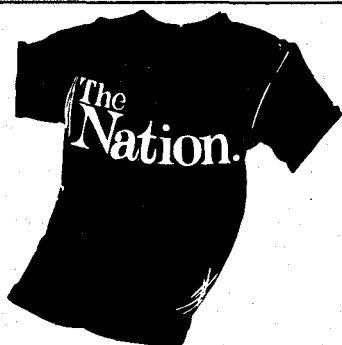
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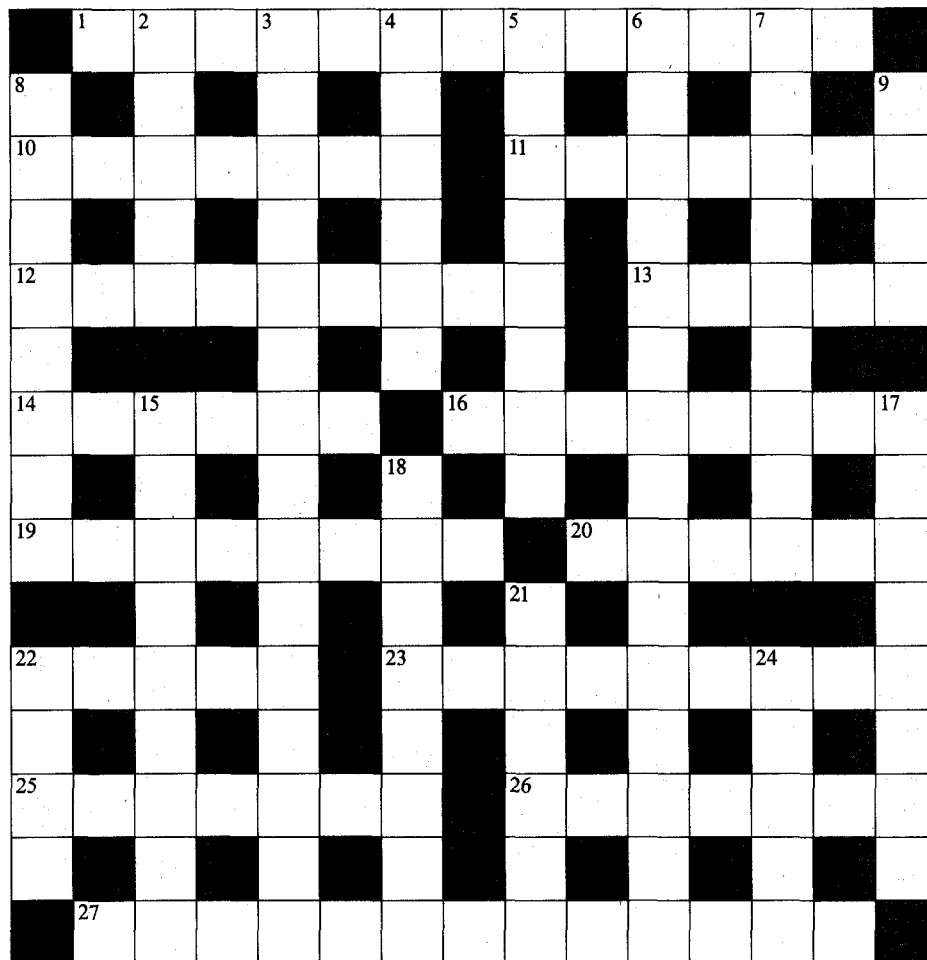
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N	C	H	E	H	I	T	E						
G	O	O	D	T	A	S	T	E	T	H	E	I	R



ACROSS

- 1 Perhaps one of the characters in *Guys and Dolls*, hoping to be better. (Teddy was one.) (3,4,6)
- 10 An obvious tool for the woodsman, but that's what the country does, according to some people! (7)
- 11 Drink and make merry with music—the oriental says it's good for you! (7)
- 12 Act put on with a short skirt, getting able to see the Republic, possibly. (9)
- 13 They may be proper, or quite common—implying an absence of sunburst. (5)
- 14 Even a bad priest might show such sprightly wit. (6)
- 16 The kind of supper a dog enjoys might be responsible for much growth. (8)
- 19 A little bit of money, as the British once said, should be quite a distant object. (8)
- 22 and 20 If fit enuf, have a fling with one of the main drags! (5,6)
- 23 The roving, roving traveler might have such a case! (9)
- 25 A ringer with a short, sharp shock—holding an experiment in the lab, perhaps. (4,3)
- 26 A rather large trouble for the maid, as they used to say! (7)
- 27 The stuntman for the actor has a purpose, but you might be expected to get it with a pun. (6,7)

DOWN

- 2 What I do when I flash a big smile in support? (1,4)

- 3 What a professional rider has to do to progress? (3,2,4,3,3)
- 4 A southern neighbor has me with a number of football players, and a little company to provide it. (6)
- 5 Drunk, as they say, but there's no getting on with it in the classic movie. (4,4)
- 6 What isolationists preached might be not in! Not in? Never! (15)
- 7 In part when I sleep, I cure another person of sensitive taste. (9)
- 8 One of the Yellow Pages might be an expensive put-on! (4,4)
- 9 Iron? Bronze? They're examples of what one does in time. (4)
- 15 Left on top, the rest comes up with a greasy liquid of this in case it's for the papers. (9)
- 17 Continue to prevaricate? Be quiet! (3,5)
- 18 Once containing a sour mixture, it certainly wasn't off the beam! (2,6)
- 21 Mar the surface between C and G, with one in the card game. (6)
- 22 Little 17 without the register? (4)
- 24 The arrangement of fiber in wood or cereal? (5)

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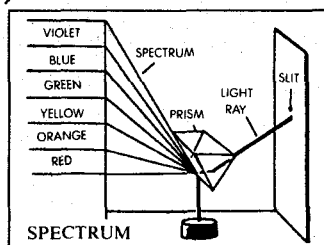
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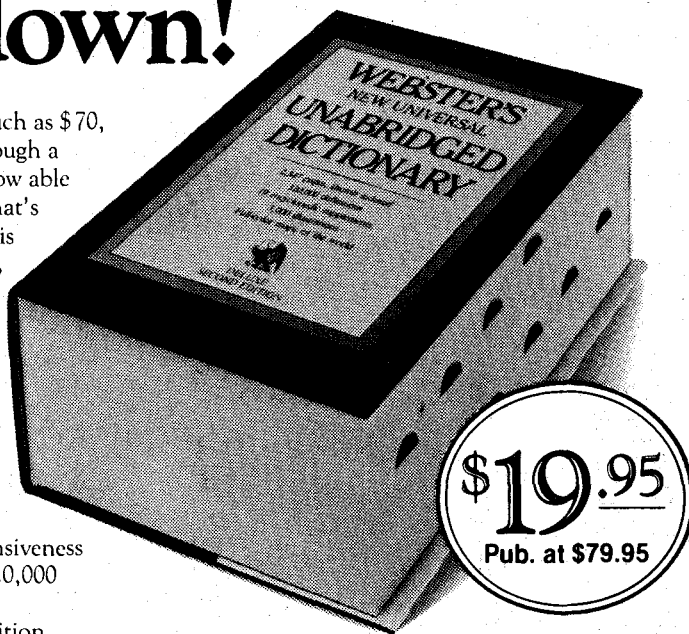


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